

LANDFEASTED



A. G. BICKLEY

AND

G. S. CURRYER.



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HANDBASTED

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BY

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P R E F A C E .



THE story we now offer to our readers is a very simple one, and its theme, unhappily, trite and commonplace; a mere tale of woman's faith and fondness, and of man's callousness, which, however, may or may not cover a substratum of honour.

It is considered now-a-days—at least, in some quarters—little less than a breach of literary etiquette to put a preface to a novel, but we feel that to allow this story to leave our hands without a foreword to the reader would be unfair. It would be superfluous for us to apologize for the period in which

the story is placed ; but whilst disclaiming the slightest attempt at what is usually styled “historical accuracy,” we hope we have to some extent reproduced the spirit of the time of which we have written, a time which appeared to afford the happiest setting for our story, hence its choice.

Possibly some lovers of detail among our antiquarian friends will discover the absence of what may appear, to them, all-important minutiae, in which event we offer them our sincerest—congratulations.

Doubtless our friend the “critic” will favour us with the information that our work is laboured, and distinguished by an easy spontaneity ; that it is prolix, and that if it has a fault, it errs in the direction of over-conciseness ; that it is as heavy and sad as a badly-baked batter, also that it is marked by cheerfulness and a sparkling humour ; or, as he was good enough to inform a novelist on

a recent occasion, which shall be nameless, in one week's issue of his valued organ of "light and leading," that the book under review was, metaphorically speaking, in an advanced stage of moral decomposition ; and in that of the following week that it was one of the most remarkable contributions to the literature of pure morality which had appeared for a very long time. He might have added, and we wonder he did not, for the sake of further illustrating his consistency, since the publication of, say, "*La Terre*." Possibly he will tell us that its English is slipshod, that its effects are laboured, and, in short, that it is the embodiment and epitome of all that a novel should not be ; and if we should be fortunate enough to live until the next issue of his estimable journal, we may learn that it is the exact antithesis of all that he has previously specified. All this, and more, the over-

worked, underpaid, and indifferently-read literary critic has done, is doing, and will continue to do till the end of the dreary chapter. Truly the critic's life "is not a happy one."

But, joking apart, we are perfectly aware that there are critics, and criticasters ; nor would we insinuate that only those who appreciate our humble efforts, and speak a kind word of commendation, or an equally kind word of blame, are to be placed in the former category. We should be the last to advocate the laying of an embargo upon the expression of honest opinion. From the pens of such of the noble army of critics as have themselves been through the mill, and know not only what it costs to read a novel, but also what it costs to write one, a word of generous appreciation is beyond price to the man who honestly believing that he has a story that must get

itself written, has honestly endeavoured to write it. From these, who have won their spurs, the man who has done his best is glad to accept even the tardily-given adverse notice, well knowing that it cost the man who dealt the well-deserved blow little less than the poor wretch upon whose luckless shoulders it fell. But, whilst this is so, we protest against the mosquito bites of fledgeling critics who mount an office stool, and, pen in hand, run a-muck of that which, at least, deserves such honest treatment as they are entirely incapable of bestowing upon it.

To these gentry we commend the consideration of what purports to be a modern discovery in theological science, which may prove beneficial to them, viz., that the Devil, the diabolical non-constructive morbus of disintegration, invisible and intangible as it may be, nevertheless casts a shadow tangible

and visible, and its name is “the merely negative critic.” And in the end the efforts of the shadow, we can assure them for their consolation, will prove as abortive as those of the substance.

Folk-loreists and antiquaries will doubtless be sorry to hear that the venerable custom of “handfasting” is almost a thing of the past ; the rest of the world, we feel sure, will rejoice with us.

A. C. B.

G. S. C.

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HANDBASTED.



CHAPTER I.

THE WITCHES' FROLIC.

THERE was profound sorrow in Winterbourne, for a pinnacle from the church tower had fallen, crushing in its fall the greatest witch doctor for miles around, and injuring his only son.

Most of the country people attributed the accident to the malice of the witches, who, they said, must have rallied all their forces, and increased their strength by every diabolical means, thus to destroy their greatest enemy.

Not a few of the inhabitants had strange tales to tell of various bewitchments the doctor had cured; of cases in which he had turned away the evil eye, and even of one case in which he had measured his power against that of a notorious witch, and conquered.

Some of the wiser inhabitants put this skill down to a greater knowledge of medicine than the other apothecaries of that countryside, and asserted that the witch was nothing more than a poor deranged old woman with a mischievous and eerie turn of madness, whom he had taken into his house and, by kindness, cured. This tale was borne out by the woman herself, but very few could be found to believe it; and the rest declared that those who did were mere envious detractors from the doctor's prowess, who only wanted an opportunity to do damage to their neighbours' property.

No one with a complete set of senses could doubt for a moment that it was the devil that threw the pinnacle down ; for the wind had not been so very high, and had not Bill the mason said that the pinnacle in question might last for several years if plastered and cramped ? This, of course, had not been done ; but no one save Bill remembered it, and he, a firm believer in witchcraft, instantly banished the thought from his mind, as a good Christian should, and adjourned to the "Red Lion," there to prove his hatred of all witches by getting drunk in drinking to their eternal confusion.

Much sorrow for the dead doctor was expressed verbally, but no one seemed willing to give the body house-room, for fear of the evil powers that be. So it was thrown into the charnel-house until such time as the parson should find it convenient to bury it.

The son was removed to the house of Richard Tyler, blacksmith and mayor of the town. His leg was broken, and he was much bruised; still, the apothecary did not consider his case serious.

Tyler was a kind-hearted soul, when it suited his interest so to be, and could not believe that the witches would hurt him now that they had had their vengeance; so he had taken up the young man, and acted the part of the good Samaritan towards him, or rather, we should say, of the innkeeper who was tolerably certain of the twopence; no easy task, as both his wife and servant refused, from very fear, to go near his charge, and pain made the visitor's temper, never of the best, violent and peevish. But Arthur Crosby got better, as the apothecary had predicted, and for a short time was the hero of the sleepy little town.

CHAPTER II.

ELSIE AND HER IDEAL.

ELSIE sat in her chamber, high above the street it far overhung. A charming chamber it would look in a picture, full of nooks and crannies, with the moulded rafters of the roof coming far down the wainscoted walls. There was a wide fire-place, set with Dutch tiles representing the story of Susannah and the Elders, and a mantelpiece quaintly carved in wood, so high that the shelf was useless. The window, too, had carved mullions fitted with quarries which had been placed there as plain glass, but which now held no mean variety of pale tints. The spotless whiteness

of curtains and bedclothes reflected pleasantly against the darkened oak panelling of the walls. The floor was partly matted, and the furniture, which stood in stiff propriety against the walls, was polished until it shone like a mirror. To us the chamber would appear a gem, so quaint was it in its antiquated primness; but its owner viewed it with different eyes. To her thinking it was too large, and low; the furniture was so heavy and clumsy; even the downy bed, smelling sweetly of lavender, came in for a share of her contempt because of its height, which we are bound to confess was so great that it was necessary for Elsie to climb before she reached its hospitable shelter. The quarried panes were too dark and green, and distorted things seen through them. Elsie longed for large panes and silken curtains; she sighed to be something more than Alderman Steele's daughter, though he was justly accounted one

of the richest and most respectable burgesses of Winterbourne. Like a true woman of all times she loved, what she thought to be, the superior. Having—in her father's opinion—received over-much education, and being undeniably very pretty, she ignored, as it appeared natural she should, all the love the young burgesses of the town, rough-mannered, warm-hearted, stupid men, lavishly wasted upon her. In sooth, she was an imperious little goddess, and hard to please.

It is useless to deny that Elsie was a charming girl. No one, however fastidious he might be, could find in his heart to affirm that the old-fashioned room did not make a delightful picture when its owner occupied it; no one, whatever his tastes, could look at her and not own that Elsie was fair to see. We are not going to describe her as if she were a chattel and we the auctioneers; therefore all we shall say is that she barely reached the

middle height of women, that her figure was trim, and her cheeks shone in rosy contrast to the rest of her clear white skin. Her face expressed the good-nature and intelligence which were conspicuous in her life, while the big brown eyes were as patient, honest, and faithful as those of her father's mastiff. Can we bestow higher praise?

As Elsie was not yet nineteen she might be pardoned for being just a little vain, and more than a little disdainful of the swains who clustered around her. Now, Arthur Crosby was unquestionably what is usually denominated "a gentleman," poor, perhaps, and bad tempered, certainly, yet a gentleman by birth and breeding, the first Elsie had ever seen, and on him she fixed her girlish affections. She fancied him a prince in disguise, and invested him with those thousand charming fancies that every true woman weaves about the man she loves. She had

only spoken to him two or three times, but this was sufficient to enable her to build up that gossamer fabric of impossible perfections which go to make up the romantic ideal of inexperienced womanhood. Of course, this ideal was about as like Arthur Crosby as the proverbial chalk is like cheese; but this Elsie failed to perceive; and, alack, there was none to show her. She had written her name as plain Mrs. Crosby, as Lady Crosby, and even as Countess Crosby, with great satisfaction to herself, times and again; and had pictured her hero in many a scene in which she played a prominent part, and which generally ended in his dropping gracefully on one knee, and exclaiming in heart-melting tones, "Fair lady, wilt thou be mine?" after the manner of the play-actor in the theatre to which she had been during her only visit to London. Yet for all these visions Elsie was as simple and modest a

maiden as ever man wished to make wife.

To-day the dreams were in full force—and no wonder. The sun made even this dimly-lighted, ancient room too hot for work; the quiet-eyed cattle in the meadows behind the low houses across the street were too idle to eat, and stood lazily clustered together in the pool beneath the alders; the street below was deserted, and only the bell of a restless goat and the drowsy hum of bees called attention to the silence, which they but emphasised. To-day she was the bride being presented at Court; to-day she was the great lady, admired for her beauty, respected for her position, the compendium of happiness and goodness; so the red-headed apprentice, to whom his fair young mistress was a divinity, had to knock and knock before she could be aroused to the sublunary and disgusting fact that dinner was served.

It was served, but in very rough and vulgar style, Elsie thought ; and, in fact, it was more on the table than on platters. There was no silver, only two-pronged forks, and everything laid higgledy - piggedly. James Steele, saddler and alderman, was carving a piece of boiled beef, stopping at times to transfer an approved morsel into his mouth, dispensing with the accustomed ceremony of first putting it on his plate. A fine man was Elsie's father, hale and hearty, evidently well fed, his countenance beaming with good-humour and honesty—not a very clever face perhaps, but a pleasant one nevertheless. Mrs. Steele had thrown off her good looks by an over-anxiety about many things ; she looked sharper, more sour, and less sympathetic than her husband, although much latent goodheartedness might be discovered in her face by a close observer. Mattie, the maid-of-all-work, and

Samson, the apprentice, completed the party. As to the kitchen, any curious reader who wishes to know what it was like will kindly be pleased to remember the last kitchen he was in, in a house two hundred years old, and we will pledge our honour he will then have a perfect picture of the one in question.

“Late again, Elsie,” was her mother’s salutation. “I do wish you would be in time ; it will be no such small matter when you are married and your husband must see to his business. I never was such an idle hussy.”

To this reproof Elsie had no reply, so she turned up her nose by way of protest against a proposition the truth of which it was impossible to deny.

Presently the alderman broke silence.

“Hast heard of the accident ?”

“What accident ? and how should

"I hear of it?" inquired Mrs. Steele, sharply.

"The accident to Dr. Crosby," answered her husband, wisely ignoring the somewhat bitter query.

"Now, James, is it likely I should hear of it? Do you think I have nothing to do but to gad about getting news?" sharply rejoined his better half.

"Why, as he was passing by the church tower a pinnacle dropped off and struck him dead, and injured his son as well."

"Injured Arth—Mr. Crosby!" exclaimed Elsie, looking up—"Not seriously?"

"No, my girl," rejoined the saddler. "Mr. Muckthwaite do say as how that he'll get better. His leg be broken, and he be martial bruised. I'd like to hang all they witches, I would," he added, with increased energy, "as is allus a doing mischief!"

“There will be no one to prevent it now,” said his wife.

“No,” assented the alderman; gravely adding, “this all comes of not hanging Mother Brunton; who ever heard o’ a witch being grateful?” No one being able to dispose of this question, he opined that it was time to be going back to business, and accordingly he, the abigail and the red headed apprentice disappeared forthwith.

Elsie went to her own room, there to have a good cry over the unfortunate sufferer, but less over his sufferings than the fact that a husband lamed by so unromantic an incident was a much less desirable personage than one with his proper complement of limbs. A very childish thing to do, perhaps, but still very natural. Say, gentle lady reader, would you like a lover who limped? and do you think you could as easily learn to love a man with a halt, or to admire a one-eyed Apollo,

as a perfect specimen of the *genus* man? Poor Elsie, she pictured her hero with a wooden leg, and her ideal was rudely shattered.

The old doctor had long been a great friend of Elsie's. He had in bygone years won the hearts of her parents by the kindly notice he had taken of her, and had long since become a welcome guest in her home. Their hospitality he repaid by teaching the daughter many of those accomplishments which, though common to the children of middle-class people nowadays, were very uncommon then. Elsie could talk a little French, which gave great offence to many of the burghers, who had all the Wessex antipathy to the language of "Johnny Frog." She knew a little, a very little, Latin, had read much poetry, could play upon the virginals; she even knew the chief events in the history of her own country. Arthur's visits to his father had been few and brief, and on such occasions neither he nor his

father visited any of the townspeople. His last visit had been much longer, and Arthur had condescended to make friends, in a haughty, distant way, with the honest saddler. The old doctor had always spoken with great awe and circumspection of his son, throwing out vague hints of his power and station, and treating him with all the deference a son should pay his father.

Dark, with deeply set eyes—very keen and bright—with a handsome face, and an appearance and bearing which we can find no better words to describe than “educated nonchalance,” Arthur Crosby was quite a hero among the maidens of the town, and the impression he produced was heightened in their eyes by his proud, exclusive, and often insolent manners. His imperfections were all patent enough to the young men, who both hated and envied, while they stood in no little awe of, him.

His qualities, however, were magnetic to the weaker sex generally, and amongst them to Elsie in particular. His manner hitherto towards her had been that of a gracious lord to an humble cottager, a curious mixture of patronage and contempt, half veiled in a scantling of politeness that might or might not be banter. Elsie was happily oblivious of all this, and his father's broad hints and evident deference impressed her with a vague overpowering consciousness of his superiority.

CHAPTER III.

HOW THE IDEAL MISBEHAVED : AND SUNDRY
OTHER MATTERS.

ARTHUR CROSBY was "progressing favourably," as the doctors say. His restlessness had hindered him much, but he might perfectly recover without even a trace of lameness. He was lying on a couch in the low homely room of the blacksmith, passing the time by alternately grumbling and reading an odd volume of seventeenth century poetry. A girl sat in the window seat, the blacksmith's youngest daughter, a friend of Elsie's.

She listened to the young man's grumblings

with exemplary patience, generally echoing his words, while she occasionally endeavoured to give a more pious turn to the conversation, which was conducted by Arthur on his part in a strain which, to her puritanical notions, was most irreverent and improper.

One hundred and forty years ago liberty of thought was a thing which was scarcely dreamed of, much less exercised. The Church and her ministers reigned supreme in all departments of knowledge, and any breadth of thought was not only regarded with suspicion, but was expected by the common people to be visited by an immediate judgment. Indeed many of the inhabitants were not slow in avowing their firm belief that Dr. Crosby's death was a visitation of Providence, because he had protected supposed witches from the summary judgment of people who imagined themselves diabolically enchanted.

Arthur had mixed in what was known as "the great world," the passing fashion of which was, for the moment, an affectation of shallow scepticism and irreligion, and so had acquired a considerable stock of cheap second-hand theological doubts, of which he was prodigiously proud ; and no small amount of the moral laxity, which but too often finds a wished-for excuse in such teaching. The tone of the times was low—perhaps Crosby was no whit worse than most men of his age, and with like temptations ; but he was certainly very lax according to our notions, and even according to the standards of the better thinking people of his day.

"Curse this place ! there's not a decent soul to speak to in it," said Arthur, "saving you," he added, as he saw the girl's face darken.

The compliment did not brighten it.

"It is wicked to swear," she said. "Don't you know how God punished——"

“Who?” demanded the patient.

“Why — what’s his name — don’t you know?”

“I don’t know much about your Bible gentlemen,” he said; “nor do I want to,” he added, in an undertone.

Meanwhile, she was puzzling her head about the name and the history of the individual she imagined was punished for swearing, when the door opened, and Elspeth Steele walked in; which was a fortunate entrance, at least in that it saved Hetty’s reputation with Arthur for Biblical knowledge.

“Oh, Mr. Crosby!” she exclaimed, “I thought you were still upstairs, or I should have used more ceremony in obtruding myself on your presence.”

Arthur felt a strong disposition to laugh at this somewhat peculiar and, for Elsie, very stilted speech, but merely answered

with a sarcastic intonation in his voice, "Your presence is too welcome, permit me to assure you, for it to be necessary for you to use any ceremony whatsoever in entering."

The satire was entirely unperceived, for Elsie turned away with a blush and a half-laugh to speak to her friend. For some reason they neither of them understood they did not kiss, and the greeting was cold.

The blacksmith's daughter thought it was a fine day.

Elsie concurred, remarking that yesterday was fine too, and if the morrow were fine, they would be having very nice weather indeed.

When truisms abound, conversation starves; and nothing more came to their lips, neither of the girls caring to mention the funeral of the doctor before Arthur,

and, both of them being secretly anxious to talk about it, the conversation flagged.

Arthur lay still, apparently too proud to join in the conversation by making any remark; as a matter of fact, he was too much amused in his indolent fashion to relieve their embarrassment. He looked again and again from under his lids at Elsie, each time thinking her prettier and more charming, and began to weave many plans, in all of which she figured prominently. Let us do him justice; he did not at this time intend to do more than indulge a mild flirtation, as he at once perceived that the girl was "smitten," and fancied that some such gentle excitement might make his enforced residence in the town more endurable.

Love is good, and if you cannot have the real article, the little imitation gods do fairly well as a makeshift.

These gods are like the prince in the

myth, who was half man and half marble ; they are living and real so far, the rest is only a picturesque disappointment.

Crosby knew that it might be long before he dared go back to his haunts in the great city, and he thought Winterbourne as good a town to hide in as any other, and as unlikely to be searched for him. He had been engaged in a political plot which had been discovered, and though he was too small a personage in it for him to have much fear for his head, he, nevertheless, fancied that Newgate would be his home should he be found during the time the conspiracy was fresh in the minds of men. His father had been one of the country agents of the Jacobites, and it was upon this treasonable subject that he came to see him when he met with the accident which made him prisoner. Long ago the father had been surprised in a similar Jacobite intrigue. He had been im-

prisoned, his estates confiscated, and, when liberated, he had been ordered to leave the country. Whilst abroad he had made much progress in the art of healing. At length the desire for a sight of his native land becoming very strong within him, he yielded to the sentiment, and returned in the character of the modest doctor, dropping his title.

Arthur by the intercession of patrons had received the greater part of the estates back again, and, inheriting his father's spirit of intrigue had entered into court life and Jacobite plots with all his heart, or should we rather say with all his interest? At first he had been regarded with considerable favour by the king, and received several trifling appointments about the royal household. In these he acquitted himself to the admiration of all, and the envy of sundry, drinking harder than the Prince of Wales, gambling, swearing, and otherwise distin-

guishing himself in such fashion that as a reward of his patent merits he was advanced to the dignified position of chief assistant clerk to the Head Supervisor of the Larder. This important and responsible office brought him into the stream of such functionaries as find their parallels to-day in the great Officers of State, with whom for a time he sailed along so well that he was lifted up with pride. In the heat of forgetfulness one unlucky day he, at a dicing party, won from Madame Walmoden, and on her accusing him of unfair play, remarked that there was a considerable want of accuracy in her ladyship's statement, though had the charge been true it would merely have been a case of the pot reproaching the kettle.

The next day he was attended by a friend of the lady's, whom he so far obliged as to pink behind Montagu House. It is almost

needless to record that forthwith court favour took to itself wings so far as our hero was concerned. The King's Grace looked sourly upon him at the next levée holden; worse still Madame frowned; and worst of all, it was intimated that the Head Supervisor of the Larder no longer required the services of his chief assistant clerk. The next day the place was given to a sweet young man who had lost, it was whispered, one thousand pounds to the Countess of Yarmouth, and was her "nephew," her ladyship admitted so much, into the bargain.

Arthur was disgusted at the poor recompense his loyalty had received, and at once went over to the opposition, resolving to see what sort of bargain disloyalty was prepared to make with him. As a matter of fact, the opposition had no places to offer, which was eminently unsatisfactory, and its petty intrigues to obtain at least the semblance of the

power it envied were too prosaic, too flimsy, for our rake. So, without the slightest personal dislike to the reigning family, he threw himself heart and soul into a plot for dethroning them. His head was saved, while many wiser and better fell, as he had not been sufficiently trusted, by reason of his somewhat recent defection from the ranks of the loyal and his well-known devil-may-caredness, to make him of sufficient importance to be looked upon as dangerous.

He pitched on Winterbourne as a safe retreat in case he was enquired for, and until now had found it so. Some of his schemes were rendered impracticable by the death of that incorrigible plotter his father, which event he deplored as another stroke of his cursed luck.

On this particular afternoon, as we have seen, he was amused for a time by the

innocent, if slightly vapid, conversation of Elsie and her friend; then he dozed, until a spasm of pain awoke him with an oath.

Of course the girls looked shocked. Miss Tyler rose and retired to titter outside the door.

“Is the pain very bad?” enquired Elsie kindly.

“Yes, these confounded bandages are loose. Hark at that sniggering idiot outside the door,” added Crosby wrathfully.

The “sniggering” suddenly ceased.

“For shame! I am sure she is always kind to you, and a very good girl. Let me arrange the bandages.”

With a slight sense of unaccountable perturbation, Elsie knelt down and put the bandages right. As she rose her hand was taken and silently kissed.

“Don’t,” she exclaimed, drawing her hand away in a perfect tumult of sensations ; “it’s very——”

“What ? ” with the utmost nonchalance.

“Why, rude,” said Elsie angrily.

“Is it ? ” this very innocently. “At court the Queen and her ladies always let me kiss their hands. I didn’t know it was rude, and I hardly think it is, for the Queen is not given to being rude or allowing rudeness.”

“Have you really been at court ? ” inquired Elsie, her eyes dilating.

“Yes, why do you ask ? ”

“Oh, nothing,” said Elsie, confused.

“But why did you ask me then ? ”

“I don’t know—because I’ve read about it in newsletters, and——”

“And you thought you would like to be there,” interrupted Arthur. “Well, child,

perhaps you would for a time. But I swear it's dreadfully stupid."

He knew this was a lie, as he had not found it stupid, but young men of his calibre always think it good form to appear bored.

"I thought it was very pleasant," quoth disappointed Elsie, "one's always reading of parties, and balls, and junketings."

"Yes, but one soon gets tired of all that nonsense," said the sage.

"Do you?" Elsie was genuinely astonished, she had thought it impossible. Not that she had had a fair chance of trying, only one ball had fallen to her lot, and the junketings had been very few and far between in her experience.

"Yes; when it's a duty to go every day and every night, and you have to be stiff and silent and cautious all the time, it's very different from the pleasant free and easy fêtes you have in the country."

"We scarcely ever have one of any sort here," sighed the maiden. "Goodbye," she added after a pause, "I must go home now."

"Must you?"

"Yes, it is nearly the time we take tea."

"Oh, well, goodbye, then."

"Goodbye."

"Come again soon, its dreadfully dull here," he called out as she left the room.

Elsie blushed and promised shyly.

Outside the door she found Hetty, looking as if she would like to be swallowed up, like Korah and Abiram.

Elsie found the silence rather embarrassing, and not easy to break; at last she remarked that "She was going home, as it was tea-time."

Hetty took no notice of the remark, and for a moment there was an awkward pause.

At length she blurted out, "Oh, Elsie, isn't he rude?"

"Hush," said Elsie, "he will hear you; let us come away from the door."

"I don't care if he does. Fancy his calling me an idiot. If I am, he should not say so while he is in our house. I shall tell my father."

"That you listened?" inquired Elsie.

"Don't be silly, Elsie," said Hetty crossly. "But he was very rude, wasn't he?"

As they were now in Hetty's bedroom Elsie felt she might speak her mind, so she agreed that Mr. Crosby was very rude, and suggested in extenuation of the offence that he suffered a great deal of pain.

"Yes, poor fellow, he does. And he is so bad tempered over it, and swears often, dreadfully. Elsie," added she, suddenly, "I wonder who he is. I am sure he is not what

his father used to say he was. I overheard him talking to himself one day (he did not know I was in the room), and he was speaking of all sorts of great people, you know, such as my Lord Chesterfield and the Earl of March. Do young lawyers generally know such people?"

"I don't know," replied Elsie; "I suppose so. He just told me that he was at court."

"At court!"

"Yes, I think he waited on the Queen, for he spoke of being with her."

"How funny; the doctor never mentioned it to father. Did he to yours?"

"No," said Elsie shortly, and, desirous of turning the conversation, she added, "Were you at the funeral? Tell me about it. Mother would not let me go."

"There is not much to tell," rejoined

Hetty. "There were a great many people there, and such a lot of strangers. None of the people liked to touch the coffin. Bill Jones, the mason, refused ; when Mr. Crosthwaite asked him, he said he would not bring destruction on his wife and babes. Nobody else seemed inclined, and what was to be done I could not think, when six men, who I have never seen before, came forward and offered to carry it. One of them told the parson he was an old friend of the doctor's. After the coffin was lowered into the grave the men threw flowers ; then they all went to the Red Lion, and afterwards left by the Salisbury coach—on their way to London, Mrs. Hollis said."

"What were they like ?" asked Elsie.

"Oh, I don't know, one who seemed to be the leader—at least the others were very deferential to him, and he said what they were

to do—was very tall, thin and dark, and had thick black eyebrows and a black wig ; another was short, sallow, and had a beard with a point to it. They were all dressed in black and wore three-cornered hats, like the parson does. And, what do you think ? Bill-o'-th'-Spade do say that he overheard one of the men say to the tall dark one—who I forgot to tell you was very handsome—where was someone, it sounded, he thought, like Kershaw ; and called him 'my lord.' ”

“ Mercy ! ” ejaculated Elsie ; adding, “ did they make any inquiries about Arth—Mr. Crosby ? ”

“ Well,” said Hetty, consideringly, “ I think father said that old Roach heard the one they called 'my lord' ask the rector if the doctor's son had not been hurt ; and when the rector said 'Yes,' he said he was sorry to hear it, and he hoped he was better,

and that Mr. Crosthwaite was to say that some friends of his father's had been at the funeral—that's all I have heard."

"Did this lord give no name?" asked Elsie.

"I don't know—I did not hear."

"Has the rector been to see Mr. Crosby?"

"Elsie, is it likely? You know it's the races at Labberton."

"I forgot. Well, when he does come, you will come to me at once and tell me what he says, won't you?"

"If I hear," conditioned Hetty.

"Of course. Good-bye! It's teatime, and mother will scold, for I was late at dinner, so good-bye, dear Hetty!"

"Good-bye, if you must go, Elsie."

So they kissed and parted.

"I think she might have stuck up for me more," said Hetty, a little bitterly, as soon

as she had closed the door on her friend "when Mr. Crosby was so nasty. I would have done if I had been in her place. I think she is rather sweet on him. Fancy liking that nasty, swearing, ill-tempered thing! Elsie always was funny. Actually she did not like good Mr. Alcock at the chapel. He is better and, I daresay, richer than this saucy coxcomb."

"She is cross," mused Elsie, as she went home to tea and a scolding for unpunctuality, "because I wasn't angry about his calling her a sniggering idiot. I don't see how I could have been, for it was really true, and she shouldn't have listened. I thought she would have asked me to stop. It looks so stupid to say you are going out to tea, and then to go back home for it. Perhaps she wants to keep Arthur to herself. Nasty little vixen, that she is—she might have told

me more about the funeral. I wouldn't be so spiteful."

And Elsie's hero whiled away the evening playing patience with a very greasy pack of political cards.

CHAPTER IV.

A RED-HEADED CHARACTER.

ABOUT a fortnight after the events narrated in the last chapter, Mattie the servant and Samson the apprentice were in the kitchen of the saddler's house, resting after the labours of the day. Mattie was much as other servant girls in Wessex—big, rosy-faced, rosy-armed, honest looking, and kind-hearted. She plays a somewhat minor part in our story, so we will leave her to the imagination of the reader, merely recording our tribute of regret at the final extinction of Mattie as a type.

With Samson it is different. He is a

very important person, so much so that he ought to have been our hero, to whom, however, we are afraid he is preferable in nearly every quality of manhood. But then we dare not ; who ever heard of a red-headed hero, of a hero with bow legs, and bull neck, and turn-up nose, and arms that were vastly too long for a trunk that was every way too short to be heroic, and with a mouth that was as wide as the all-inclusive charity that covereth a multitude of sins ? Yet such was Samson. Very coarse and vulgar he looked as he sat there by the kitchen table, gazing with dull, unintellectual eyes—between which lay a flat, vacant tract of mindless space—staring out of the window at the waving leaves that were rocking themselves to sleep in the old orchard, rubbing the cheeks of the merry-faced apples which shone with laughter in the evening sun.

Very coarse and very vulgar, though the kindliness which found a constant dwelling-place in the lower lids and lurked for ever about that ungainly mouth would have graced more classic features.

The saddler's family were out, and these two were taking their leisure, professedly employed, the one with darning stockings, and the other with some writing. But, alas! the seductive atmosphere of the summer evening was all too strong, and the stocking would drop, and the writing would not progress.

"Well, Samson, and what art writing?"

"Nowt."

"Then thou art a cleverer lad than I took thee for," said Mattie, making a joke, which being venerable was trustworthy.

Samson grinned, and stammered out, "I've been a-trying to write some poetry, but I dunno' think it be 'oop to much."

Mattie, who was profoundly astonished at the poetical attempt of her heavy companion, resumed her darning in silence. She could as easily have suspected one of farmer Rose's cart-horses of the attempt. And Samson bent down over the dirty piece of paper, covered with hieroglyphic scrawl, which his resiny hands were fast rendering illegible.

"Mattie," quoth the apprentice, after a few minutes' silence, "do your John ever write thee poetry?"

"Poetry! noa, lad," with intense disgust at the sickening suggestion; "thou mun be a fool to ask such a question. Thou knows't my John cannot write, and if he could I could not read it."

"I forgot," said Samson humbly; "I thought when folk wor in love they allus wrote poetry to each other. It mun be very bad when ye can't write and be parted."

“Oi lad, that be true,” answered Mattie ;
“but them as canna, canna, and that’s the
imposition on it, but it be nice for them as
can. I mind my cousin Jane Squire. Thou
rememberest old Mistress Squire, who lived
i’ the little white cottage agen Cockhob Mill ;
well, she had a sweetheart who were drawed
for a soldier, and for two years she never
heard on him, as they neither couldn’t write.
Jane wor very fond of him, and she pined
away little by little to a shadow, and got that
weak that when she took the fever she had
not the strength to carry it, and she lay down
under it, and of course it killed her ; Cock-
hob wor allus a feverish place. The folks
get as plim as bladders when the mists come
on. When she’d been dead a year the lad
comed back again, and my aunt told me he
took on that awful that he were put in t’
poor-house for a bit, and after that went a
gaumuck all his days.”

Samson had not paid much attention to this domestic tragedy. His thoughts were nearer home, his whole being was in labour with one of those lyrics of the universal heart, which never have nor will be written, and it could not bring forth. The expressionless face gazed at the dirty paper and the clumsy writing, and each grew more vacant, more blurred, and more illegible.

“Samson, thou art very stupid, lad.”

Yes, he was stupid, as what child of God is not stupid when the soul's passion cannot find expression in the mind's thought? That shock head of his was the temple of a mind not unlike a fallow field which, being kept carefully hoed, had the negative merit of being clean and free from weeds ; but, as no man's hand had sowed the good seed of knowledge therein, was unproductive. But the hedgerows were full of wild flowers ; honesty, truth, innocence, and that open-

souled love which comes with the child from that heaven of which it is the latest revelation, throve therein in uncultured luxuriance. Yes, "Samson, thou art very stupid, lad," but we love thee with all our hearts, and, gentle reader, we want you to love him, too, red hair, shambling gait, and stupidity notwithstanding.

"Thou needen'st look so glum, and be so silent, lad. Dost think I dunnot know what thou art after, and any other body who looked at thee when Elsie Steele's about? I wonder missus ain't a-seen it, I do."

Poor Samson, here was the secret which he supposed was *his* secret, his own, his *very* own, spoken, out loud, in common breath, to all the world—if they had been by to hear—by good-hearted, red-armed, ignorant Mattie! No wonder the lad hung down his head and blushed. No wonder that he felt dazed and miserable, that he yearned to be just then a

long, long way away, in the dark somewhere, the profound dark into which no eye could pierce. How very ashamed he felt! If Mattie knew, could not all people know, and laugh at him? the ambitious apprentice! Above all, how could he face Elsie? She might know, women were so quick, and could read men, their thoughts, their feelings; and she, to him the quickest of women, because the best of women in all ways, how could she fail where dull, blundering Mattie had succeeded? How should he appear before her any more? He would blush, he would be foolish, contemptible.

"Mattie," said Samson piteously, after a silence long unbroken, save by the rustling of the orchard trees, and the ticking of the eight-day clock which towered, in black oak case, right up against the kitchen rafters; "Mattie, has anyone else noticed it?"

"No, lad, I think not."

There was another pause, which Mattie broke.

“Don’t take on so, lad ; thous’t no need to be ashamed of it, and thou dost like the girl. But, Samson, lad, don’t take on about it, I would not set my heart on her, an’ I were thou.”

“What dost mean, Mattie ?” asked Samson, hoarsely.

“Mean? why, if she don’t like thee, I mean that it will be the harder for thee if thou dost set thy heart on her,” answered Mattie kindly, her big motherly heart full of pity at the boy’s distress.

“She don’t care about me, I think,” said Samson, sadly and very slow ; “what’s think ?”

“No, I don’t think she do care for thee ;” then, noticing the spasm of pain her answer caused, she added quickly, “not as you wants her to care.”

“'Appen she loike some 'un else?” questioned the unhappy apprentice.

“'Appen she do,” was the laconic assent.

Samson tore the paper upon which he had been toiling in half, then in half again, and again, until it was destroyed. Then he put the fragments and his pen all into the fire, as if in that holocaust he put from him all remembrance of his happiness; grotesque though the action might be, now he was strong.

“Who do 'ee think it might be—that tall Lunnon fellow, th' old doctor's son?”

“Yes,” said Mattie, “she likes him, I be-think me. Mind, lad, I doant say she loves him.”

Then Samson, like the Israelites of old, lifted up his voice and wept. And no shame to him. Is it a disgrace to him that he did not smirke and smile and say, “Ah! indeed; do you think so?” That he was

not a hypocrite, that he sought relief to his feelings by those mystic, merciful glands the All-mother Nature has provided for the purpose. The Iron Duke sat down and cried when the list of his dead was brought to him after Waterloo, and might not Samson cry? Is not a dead hope as worthy to be mourned as a dead soldier?

“Samson, she wor not for thee,” comforted Mattie, “she wor above thee, lookee, and looks to be a grand lady. She ain’t like Hetty Tyler, willing to know anybody respectable loike. Thou wouldna’ be happy an’ thee got her, I don’t think; and lad, it be no use to look at the hay when you’re tied to the rope.”

But Samson was not comforted; that he should have to climb to approach his mistress was surely no drawback. Had he not read in the big printed broadside, which he had bought of the pedlar the last time he

came his rounds, of the Bailiff's daughter of some far away village called Islington who had married a squire's son? and of the Blind Beggar's daughter of Bethnal Green? If their loves bent to them, was it quite out of the question that Elsie should bend to him? He forgot that in the ballads it was always the baron who bent to the shepherdess, the King Cophetua who condescended to the beggar maiden.

"Listen, lad," said his instructress, "I'll tell 'ee about mysen. It ain't pleasant for a lass to tell o' her own love story, but I'll tell 'ee, and ye maun tell nobody else. When I wor a slip of a 'girl I lived wi' my Aunt Susan Coggan, at Summerpool, two mile agon Cockhob. I wor much as other lasses, an' a bit foolish because I wor reckoned pretty. I did'na know John then, tho' I've telled 'en since. I used to go to Muster Church o' the summer afternoons to hear

Parson Clymer, that wor our parson's father, preach ; and more perhaps 'cause I wor an idle hussy an' liked the walk. My mother allus towld me--an' it's true, lad—that no good ever comed o' walkin' o' th' Sabbath ; sure enou' no good comed to me through it. It wor a lonely walk over the fields from Summerpool to Muster, but it wor very pretty, with the fields all covered with flowers and the brook a-runnin' along Muster Lane. One day I seed Master Claypool, who wor Squire Claypool's eldest son—they're both dead many a year now, God rest their souls. He sat in the squire's pew all alone, for t' old man never comed o' Sunday afternoon, and a handsome young fellow I thought 'en. When we come out o' the church he come up and spoke to me as kind as if I had a been the greatest o' fine ladies. You may guess I wor above a bit flattered like at his speaking to me,

though I knowed him to say "Good morning, sir," to, along o' mother having been his washerwoman, and I once wor i' th' hall when one of the maids was ill. Loike a silly girl I wor flattered and I showed it. He said he wor comin' to see Muster Thomas, who had the big house at Summerpool, and walked by my side. He wor as respectful and kind as he could be, and he never tuke a liberty, it warn't his way, he was none of yer rollicking gentlemen. I seed him again next Sunday, an' lots o' Sundays arter, and he allus come over to Summerpool an' walked wi' me. Well, lad, I presently began to be a bit i' love wi' 'ee, and to fancy he wor wi' me, an' many an' many an hour have I wasted over thinking what I'd do when I wor a foine lady and went up to Lunnon. Arter this had been agoin' on for some three months I heard as how he wor agoin' to be married to Miss Habershorn,

up to Nithouse—not that he ever wor, poor man, bein' killed in they wars. By the way, he wor captain i' th' regiment in which Jane's sweetheart served. Very next Sunday when he comed out o' church I walked on a bit, an' he overtakes me, an' says in his pleasant way, 'An' what be the matter with you, Mattie?' Then I out and gives as much o' my mind as I dared, for we cottagers dar'n't say all what we did mean to great folk then. I told 'ee I loved him, an' that he'd tried to maak me love him, an' that he wor a wicked man. He turned that pale an' said, 'God forgive me, Mattie, but I have. I did not mean to, Mattie,' says he, 'you must do me justice; I have been thoughtless, not wicked.' 'Wor that any better for me?' I asked fiercely. Then he told me how the woman he wor engaged to loved him, an' how if he married o' me he would be guilty to her. And then he told

that I should not be happy wi' him if he married me, it wor so different to what I'd been bred to. I thought different then, though, thank God, I see it clear enough now. Twelve years makes a someness o' difference, an' I wor but sixteen then; well, I forgived him, not that I had much to forgive, tho' he said as I had. We said 'Good-bye' in the long field. The rain came on, and somehow I felt it wor washing my life away along wi' it.

"It warn't long after that the day wor fixed for his marriage, and not a month afore the war broke out. Well, he got killed by one o' those monkey foreigners, and great sorrowing there was. At sixteen one don't feel very deeply, an' I soon forgot as I'd ever loved him. Now I can see that it wor I were foolish, an' that it wor nothing but good nature on his part."

“And what’s this to do with me?” said Samson.

He had sat still all the time, attentive and miserable, listening but not comprehending; but firmly convinced in his own mind that this was the very stupidest story he ever had heard. But not many weeks had passed when he came and thanked Mattie for it; now he only asked rudely, “And what’s this to do with me?”

“Wait awhile and think a bit, lad,” answered Mattie. “Thou baist not a foine gentleman, and——”

“And” what Samson never knew, for the worthy saddler lifted the latch and walked in, followed by his wife and Mr. Mayor.

Of course there was no more talk between the pair that night. Supper! The alderman was hungry, and Samson must go to the “Cat and Bottle” to fetch the

beer and some cordial waters. Then he must make haste over his supper and go to the Mayor's for Miss Elsie. How his heart beat at the thought! How he wished he could be suddenly taken ill that Mattie might go; and then he felt glad that he must go, and thought how precious would be the ten minutes he would spend walking behind his mistress, according to the custom of the time. He hung down his head to hide his confusion, but he caught one scrap of the conversation.

"Taen your rooms, has he?" his master asked of the Mayor.

"Yees," said that functionary. "Yees; my wife thought that now the young 'uns were agettin' away, the house be too big; and as times be a bit hard, we'd make a penny by rentin' the rooms. Young master be goin' away for a week in a bit to see some o' his foine friends, and then

he's comin' back for a month, or maybe two."

"What in the name of goodness is he going to stop in Winterbourne for?" questioned the saddler's wife sharply. "We've scapegraces enou' here, wi'out him. Though he be a nice young gentleman enou' to speak to, in a manner of putting it," she added.

"Be 'ee, mum," grinned the Mayor.

"Well"—very crossly—"I daresay you are not too sweet, if you've aught t' matter wi' you. Leastways, I only goes by what Mrs. Tyler have said." This last was intended for jocularitv, and Mr. Mayor received it with a laugh.

"Leave missus alone for abusin' of me," he said.

"Now then, Samson, get thee gone as quick as 'ee can, and doan't 'ee loiter with t'other idle ones," enjoined the housewife.

Samson bore the imputation of idleness very meekly—in truth, it was not altogether undeserved—and departed on his errand with his heart none the lighter for the scrap of conversation he had overheard.

CHAPTER V.

UNDER THE MOON.

IT was truly bad news for Samson that Arthur should have determined to take up his abode, even for a time, in Winterbourne. Mattie that night had confirmed his gravest misgivings, and in his heart he believed, however loth he might be to admit it, that Elsie loved, rather than liked, Arthur Crosby. He had no definite idea that her love might not be returned by the gentleman in question, or that he might entertain dishonourable ideas towards her. That any person should be so insensible as not to love Elsie, or could be so base

as to contemplate wronging her, never entered into his calculations. But it did occur to him, very vividly indeed, that Mr. Crosby was not altogether his ideal of a husband for Elsie. Though, perhaps, he would have thought pretty much the same thing of any other man in the same relation. What swain ever yet was magnanimous enough to own the superior virtues, or admit the prior claims, of a rival? Suppose Jonathan had loved Bathsheba, would not David have sent him off alongside Uriah to meet the Philistines, and told his general to put him too in the forefront of the battle. If such a distinguished example of disinterested friendship could not stand the strain of such a test, it is not to be wondered that Samson should fail to see the superiority of a gentleman who systematically snubbed him in a most discourteous manner, that is, when

he condescended to be aware of his existence. Then, again, had not his young mistress been even more than usually contemptuous to him of late?

There is little perspective in love, and when the object of admiration is held quite close its virtues are exaggerated out of all proportion to their intrinsic dimensions. Arthur Crosby was in such close proximity to the eyes of Elsie's heart, that her humbler lover contrasted very unfavourably by comparison.

So Samson trudged on sadly, mindful of Mistress Steele's caution. He stopped not to talk with the other apprentices congregated about the door of the "Red Lion," nor to look at the brand new embroidered waistcoat pieces in Mr. Hedge, the tailor's, window. The idle talk of his fellows about the beating Jack Straw got from the mercer his master, or how Tummus is out of his time and going

to set up for himself in a village hard by, where Nancy the cook-maid at the parson's is to keep him company, or of the crops, the weather, or the other simple topics of the simple time and simple people; none of these things could interest him to-night, and he felt that no flowered piece that ever came from a Bradford loom could restore his peace of mind. So he made the best of his way to Mr. Mayor's house.

Now Mr. Mayor lived away from his forge, and had an old-fashioned house on the outskirts of the town. It stood by itself, in a pleasant little garden, and was as uncomfortable a house as the most romantic maiden could have wished for. To get at the parlour you had to go through the kitchen, the best bedroom could only be approached by going through another, the front door was at the back, the outbuildings forming a projection at the front, and the stairs rambled

promiscuously all over the premises, emptying themselves by the side of the kitchen fire-place.

But it is waste of time to describe it further, for the arrangement of the house has nothing to do with any part of our story.

We must, however, note an interesting fact illustrating the peculiar construction of the staircase, which is that Hetty's eldest sister but two fell down the stairs on her fifteenth birthday, having forgotten the last twist but one in them, through having been visiting with her grandmother for the seven previous months, and broke her left arm just above the elbow.

Samson was shown into the kitchen, which was usually the family sitting-room as well ; but to-night all who were at home, with the exception of Mrs. Tyler, were with Mr. Arthur who, for a wonder was trying to

make himself agreeable. Mrs. Tyler had not got over the idea that the witches might not have had their complete revenge, and, though she was not afraid for herself, she did not like to be too much in the company of her lodger. She thought it might be a tempting of Providence unbecoming in a Christian woman.

It had been hard work to convince this lady that no danger to her family was incurred by giving house-room to so questionable an inmate. Indeed, we much doubt whether she would have given in at all but for the fact that an amount due to the blacksmith had not been paid, and they were hardly put to for money.

Arthur had insisted, with the characteristic generosity of a spendthrift, on their taking what was a considerable sum in those days for his board and lodging, and he was, in fitful sort, so pleasant that Mrs. Tyler's heart

quite softened towards him, for all the stories of his wild rakishness which had begun to get about.

Samson she was very fond of (indeed, he was a sort of cousin of hers, some fifty-seven times removed), and she saw the making of a successful man in him. His parents, who had been dead for several years, had left him nothing but an honest name. Still, although he had been apprenticed by a town charity, his prospects were not bad, as she constantly told the worthy blacksmith. Mr. Steele had no son to succeed him in his business ; was it not therefore probable that in time it should come to Samson ? And, as she thought in her thrifty way, would he not make a good husband for Hetty ? But this she had never dared to hint to any one.

Elsie, she saw, thought herself too good for the lad, and her parents, who always took their cue from their daughter, thought so too.

So there was nothing in this amiable match-maker's way save Samson himself, and she never dreamt that she should meet with any opposition in that quarter. He was only an apprentice, and would, no doubt, recognize his own interest, and be glad enough to marry into such a family as the Mayor's. "Soft as he is, he is a great deal too good for that fanciful chit of a thing, and Hetty can have her own way much more," thought she, "than if he were one of your over-wise gentlemen. Bless me, that business must be worth I don't know how much a year." At the instance of this vague calculation, she welcomed Samson warmly.

"So thou'st come to fetch thy young missus home, hast 'ee, Samson, laäd, and t' master's at thy house, ay? Well, ye mäun wait a bit, ye mäun; th' young'uns be having a bit of a jig in the parlour, and Mr. Arthur's a playin' some tune for 'em to dance to on

the new music machine he's gotten down from London, a harpsicord, I think he called it. Would'st like to go in to 'em, laäd ?”

Samson shook his head.

“Ye won't go ?” continued the good dame ; “thoust one of the sober sort, thou bë'st.”

Another shake from Samson's head, this time deprecatingly.

“Well, girls maun be girls, an' boys maun be boys, an' a bit of pleasurin' I don't think be amiss every now and then.”

Samson's head assented dubiously, and Samson's mouth opened as if about to perpetrate a remark, when the voluble dame continued,—

“I don't like them music boxes, whaät does a man want wi' yon foolery ? If he wants music let him go to the church of a Sunday and hear the fiddles, which wambles one's very innards.”

Samson again assented, but this time unconditionally.

“Yon feller goes seldom enough; doän't like the vicar, he say. So I says to 'ee, when he told me, I says, ‘I guess thou doesn't like what he preaches aboüt, it be too home-comin' like for 'ee. Thou loikest thy foine court preachers, as don't talk about hell and damnation, and tells thee thou art good enough, that's the soärt 'ee like,’ I says. He laughed and said I wor right, and he was not going to be called a sinner by any man.”

“Yet we be all sinners, as parson says,” murmured Samson, in a vague attempt to express a general agreement.

“That wor his funnin’,” resumed Mrs. Tyler, who can scarcely be said to have been interrupted in the steady trickling of her verbosity; “then he wanted to teach they girls to play that thing, but I said naäy. I'd

ha' none on't, a turning my girls into idle hussies ; but bless thee, laäd, thy young misses said as she'd like well enough to play, if her mother 'ud let her. So I up and says 'Thoudst like the teacher belike, miss,' and we all burst out a-larfin again. Thou look'st pale, laäd, what hast been doing?" added the garrulous lady rapidly. "Hi! Polly, here; bring the God-a-mercy to the laäd. It's been full o' hot mead, I'll wager they ain't drunk it all i' the parlour, mon. Now, laäd, come tell us what's matter wi' 'ee, thou looks like as if thou'd been scart?"

Samson mildly protested he was well enough, and drank the mead brought for him, to her health. The dame said right, the folk in the parlour were not sufficiently enamoured of the homely drink to take much of it, the girls because they seldom drank above a small glass or so of the heady

liquor, and Mr. Arthur because his fastidious taste was so bad that he preferred the inferior claret and burgundy obtained from Salisbury to the dame's choicest brew.

“Drink it oop, laäd, and have some more,” said his hospitable hostess. “It won't do 'ee no harm, yon fellow don't loike 'un, he's allus for drinking his rot-gut French wines. ‘Coom here, missus,’ he say to me t'other day, ‘coom and taste this,’ Charter some'ut he called it, I can't remember them foreign names. I tuke a glass, for I thought I'd loike to tast 'en, and it wor for all the world th' same as bad vinegar and watter. ‘Lord bless 'ee,’ I says, ‘thee cannot drink that stuff, it's gone sour, hi, gie it me,’ I says, ‘and I'll throw it to th' pigs.’ An' he laughed a good 'un, he did, and said it wor the proper taste of the stuff; and then he says, ‘I tell 'ee what it be, Mrs. Tyler,’ he says, ‘you like it so much that thou take

and drink it thyself, that's what thou wants it for. Dost think thou art a pig?' says he. So I says to 'ee, 'I wor wrong, lad, for the pigs won't drink such stuff, nor wouldst thou if thou'dst any sense.' Lor bless me, if he didn't draw 'ees self up and look so mightily peart at that bit of a joke, well thinks I, if that be the way wi' grandees no more joking wi' em for me. But he wor as pleasant again in a few minutes when I see'd he again as ever he had been afore. But he be proud as Loocyfer, laäd, that 'ee be."

"Then you like 'ee, misses?" asked Samson.

"Loike he? ay, I loike 'ee well enough. He seems to have plenty of money, an' to be free enough with it, rather too free mayhap; he bain't much trouble i' the house, now we've got used to 'ee. Yes, he be pleasant enough; I loikes him what I'se had to do wi 'ee; allus speak o' folk as thou

findst 'em, say I, an' he's been well enough to me, so far, and to the girls too for that matter. All the stories folks tell on him mayn't be true, but one thing I know, he has a plaguy bad temper, and swears most dreadful when 'ees put out ; it 'ull take old Harry himself to be upsides wi' un."

How much more the honest woman would have said goodness alone knows ; we don't, for the simple reason that she did not say it, on account of Hetty and Elsie coming into the kitchen. These two had made up their little quarrel and buried the tomahawk in a manner very edifying to behold. In they came, after the fashion of girls, Hetty with her arm round Elsie's waist. Elsie liked this style, the little maiden knew she never looked better or more coquettish than when her plain friend was by to foil her charms. But the girl was by no means pleased that Master Samson should have been deputed as her

escort, Arthur was so much more amusing and clever, nay, even Hetty was humoursome compared with the apprentice.

So she made a little exclamation, half surprise and half petulance, at seeing him ; it was such a pity he should have come out on her account, only a few steps to go, she was sure Samson would much rather have been down at the "Red Lion," or with Polly Sutton a-courtin', etc., etc., such very sorry jokes pass muster in the heart of Wessex, especially if they are perpetrated in connection with that venerable butt of humour, matrimony.

Then Elsie went to the open window and looked out. "Such a lovely night," she said to Hetty, "do come a little way with me, there's a dear."

Hetty hereupon ascertaining that her mother had no objections, "particular as there'll be father to walk back wi'," dis-

appeared with Elsie, into the maze which found its outlet in the kitchen chimney, playfully alluded to as the staircase, to her own room. In a minute or two they reappeared, looking very dainty and pert, and professed themselves ready. How was it, in the name of wonder, that Mr. Crosby should come out of the parlour at that precise moment, and declare the night was too lovely to stop indoors? Pray, had he and Elsie arranged it beforehand between them? Had he asked her permission when they were both in the corner over there by the harpsicord, and was this why miss had looked sourly at Samson?

Some such thoughts passed, we are ready to aver, through the mind of Mrs. Tyler, and, between ourselves, she might have made a worse guess.

After a few harmless, and we must confess, pointless jokes about young folks,

scandal, and goodness knows what nonsense, the party of four got under weigh. Arthur paired off with Elsie, and Samson, much to his disgust, was left to Miss Hetty. His notion was that men and girls should walk separately through the streets for fear the town should talk. The conversation of the latter couple is not difficult to record, chiefly by reason of its extreme scarcity. If any one wants to know what these two said, let them get an average country lass and lad—both of whom must be a trifle stupid—set them to talk, and they will supply a tolerably accurate replica of Samson and Hetty's conversation on this night. When they arrived at their journey's end Samson had made twelve observations and Hetty thirteen, and of these twenty-five remarks, six related to Farmer Jones's pigs, one of which had got the measles; seven to the

weather, and the balance to a variety of equally absorbing topics.

Arthur's convalescence had been slow, and a little exertion sufficed to intensify the pallor of his usually pale face. To-night his eyes were unusually brilliant, and he shivered nervously as he walked by the side of the pretty, conscious little figure.

"Give me your arm, child!" he said, in rather a hard, dry tone Elsie thought. "I am not as strong as I thought I was."

Elsie's arm trembled a little as she offered it, with a fluttering sense of misgiving for which she was entirely at a loss to account.

They conversed in low tones and walked in the deep shadow of the trees that lined the road between the Mayor's house and the town.

Arthur talked rapidly, with a half reck-

less, half earnest manner, which contrasted strangely with the flippant bantering tone he usually affected, and which flattered and frightened poor silly Elsie until her head felt light and giddy.

As they were nearing the alderman's house their conversation was of Arthur's departure on a visit to some friends, of which he had been informing Elsie in such a way as to make the girl feel that he had chosen her for a *confidante*.

"But you are coming back to Winterbourne?" she asked, her heart sinking at the alternative prospect.

"Why yes, child, to be sure I am coming back to Winterbourne."

Then there was a lull in the conversation. They were very close together, and Arthur leant on Elsie's arm as if he were weary.

"I wonder that you are coming back

to Winterbourne, Mr. Crosby. You must find it so dull here without any company," she said, with coquettish timidity. "Why do you come?"

"Because I cannot stay away," answered Arthur, impetuously. "Because I am a fool; because — can't you guess why, child?"

We cannot tell what Elsie's reply might have been, because at this precise moment they became aware that they had got to Mr. Steele's door; but the rosy flush on her cheeks and brow, and the unusual gleam in her quiet eyes, as they paused, suggested a reply that Elsie might have found embarrassing to put into words.

On the door being opened Mrs. Steele appeared, insisting that they must all go inside. The Mayor was not quite ready, so the young folks must wait. Then there was more spiced ale and more fearful

mead. Then Arthur must sing a song, and tell some funny stories of the great ladies and gallants in town. Very merry these good folks were, they joined in the chorus of the song, and laughed, somewhat loudly perhaps, at the stories (though they were such as men tell only at their clubs now-a-days) and thought nothing wrong of it.

Frolics cannot last for ever, the lamps want replenishing, the feet of the dancers grow weary, the morn cometh, and Strephon has the manure to dump and Phyllis the cows to milk, and the cool prose of the day comes, like a refreshing breeze about the temples of the reveller, after the erotic poetry of the night.

So our good friends parted, as all good friends needs must, and went to bed. And one little maiden dreamt dreams we all might envy, so pretty were they, and pleasant; they seemed to sing a song to

her, full of happiness. Dreams go by contraries, so men say, so dream on, little sleeper, the dawn will break and the day will come, and the hard glare of daylight may perchance look the fair vision out of countenance.

CHAPTER VI.

HEREDITY.

IN a well-furnished room in a recently-built wing of an ancient mansion, sat an old lady with a square-cut face which had once no doubt been beautiful, and dark, furtive, brilliant eyes. Now the face had lost its beauty, and retained only its purity of contour and well-defined cutting. There was such a strong likeness between this aristocratic dame and our friend Arthur that no one need be surprised when that young gentleman entered the apartment, and she greeted him with,—

“Nephew Arthur! Why, what brings you here?”

“Dearest Aunt Grassthorpe,” replied Nephew Arthur, going up to the venerable lady and kissing her on both cheeks, “ill-luck—as usual.”

“Ill-luck! always ill-luck with the Crosbys,” she sighed. “You are welcome, Nephew Arthur, though you are unexpected. Are you tired?”

“No,” said Arthur. “I only came from Pangbourne this morning, and from Winterbourne the day before yesterday.”

“From Winterbourne. That unhappy place! Arthur, tell me about my brother.”

“I don’t know what I’ve got to tell,” returned that gentleman, doubtfully, “more than you got from Father Cox. All went on much the same as usual, a little better friends perhaps. He had been grumbling at me when the pinnacle fell on him. As I

was rather sulky, I had lagged a little behind him, so I only came in for a broken leg. Lucky we had quarrelled, wasn't it, though? Poor man, he had enough to grumble about."

"Hm! I agree with you. If you had been a loving couple, you would have been the first father and son of your family that were so," said the old lady angrily. "I know all about the funeral, so you needn't tell me. Did Houghton or any of the rest come to see you?"

"Come to see me! Of course not. Houghton come to see me!"

"Why not, sir?"

"Why not, well—because—why, because of the witches, aunt. They might not have taken his visiting me kindly, don't you see."

"Arthur, you are a fool!" said Lady Grassthorpe angrily.

The old lady returned to her knitting, and in less than ten minutes had expended on it the remains of her anger. The result was that in five minutes she had broken her cotton twice, dropped four stitches, and knitted together two wrong pins. Then she again spoke to her dutiful nephew, who had been amusing himself with, and at the expense of, her ladyship's lap-dog.

"What were you doing at Winterbourne, Arthur, before your father's death? Do leave that dog's tail alone, will you?"

"Paying him a visit of filial affection, to be sure, Aunt Grassthorne," said that gentleman, with a face full of innocence.

"Paying him a visit of fiddle-de-dee," rejoined the baroness. "You must think *me* a fool now. Come here, my pet. He shall not tease you, he shall not."

"D——n the dog," said Master Hopeful under his breath. Then aloud, "This does

not look like killing the over-fed calf, dear aunt."

"God knows you are prodigal enough to justify the slaughter of twenty fatted calves."

"And the revenues of Uncle Grassthorpe cannot supply the number you consider necessary for a fitting junketing," he interrupted. "Don't be cross, but tell me about my dear uncle."

"I wish I could be cross enough to do you any good," said she, with a sigh.

"But you cannot, so don't try. Now for my prophetic soul, my uncle."

"Your uncle's well. He is out now showing the Duke of Bancaster the stallion at the old farm."

"Showing who?" shouted Arthur, starting to his feet.

"Good gracious, child, don't shout so, you give one a headache. The Duke of Ban-

caster, to be sure," replied the dame testily.

"The Duke of Devildom. Is he? I say, good-bye, aunt."

"Good-bye! what do you mean? Are you bereft of your senses? Not that the Crosbys, I mean the male Crosbys, ever had much sense to be bereft of," added the old lady.

"I am not, as your ladyship seems to suppose, bereft of my senses; and I mean 'farewell,' as I am going."

"Why on earth are you going?"

"Well, you see—because I am."

"Don't be rude, sir. You ought to give *me* a civil answer at least. Why are you going like this, and what are you in such a state of sudden excitement about?" asked Lady Grassthorpe anxiously, for she loved this dark-souled, wayward boy as her own child.

"I don't want to see Bancaster, aunt."

"My dear boy, why not? I thought you were vastly friendly with him."

"Er—so we were, aunt," said Arthur, ruminating without grammar; "at least we used to gamble together, and you know that's much the same thing. By the way, I might as well tell you the story, which is somewhat long and prosy, some other time. Anyhow, I don't choose to see Bancaster."

Lady Grassthorpe looked at him from under her penthouse brows, and saw he meant what he said. So without a word she laid her hand on the bell-rope and rang for the major-domo. That functionary appeared with an alacrity that suggested somewhat close proximity to the keyhole.

"Tomkins, Lord Bancaster will dine here. Let his servant dine alone, and see," she added, meaningly, "that he is not informed who is in the house."

Tomkins was seasoned to mystery in that house, so he merely glanced at Arthur, accompanying the glance with a bow.

“Have you any further commands, my lady?” he inquired.

“Yes, let the blue chamber in the north wing be made ready at once for Sir Arthur, who will dine there alone. Does any one sleep in that wing.”

“Only the footmen, my lady.”

“And bring some burgundy,” shouted Arthur as the man disappeared.

In a few minutes Arthur’s mind had been made easy by the information that the Duke could not possibly be back for two hours at least, so he might tell his tale at once. The burgundy having arrived, and Hopeful having refreshed his wits by imbibing thereof, and revived his spirits by pulling the dog’s tail, made shift to begin with,—

“I have had a long run of cursed ill luck.”

“At cards, do you mean?”

“No. I won latterly at play—about twelve hundred, if I remember, from Chesterfield and Jack at White’s. Still, it was at cards after all. Me and the Walmoden and Chesterfield and Salisbury, and the devil knows how many more, were playing vingt-et-un at the Bernsteins, some time ago, and it was my turn to deal. I doubled on an ace, and then hang me if I did not get another ace, so I went on two. Of course the next card for me was faced and a ten, no one was sharp enough to call it, so I took it, and if the next card wasn’t a king! A double natural! So they all had to pay me twelve times. Old Yarmouth sat next to me and had betted a pony—rather heavy for her. What does she do but say to that tallow-faced put Salisbury, ‘You had better

follow my lead, my lord, and decline to pay. Mr. Crosby knew his cards before he staked his money.' ”

“ The brazen jade ! ” exclaimed the old lady, in hot indignation.

“ ‘ Wait a bit ! ’ I up and said, ‘ there is a considerable want of accuracy in your ladyship’s statement. I did not know what cards I had. ’ ‘ You took a faced card, ’ says she. ‘ Why did not your ladyship call it ? ’ says I. ‘ Because you did not give time, ’ she rejoined. Then I forgot myself and said, ‘ Nor did you give me time to secure my counters from your ladyship, ’ for she had taken a lot of my counters during the evening, as she always did, you know. Then she said I had insulted her, and there was the very deuce of a row. I quarrelled, she quarrelled, and everybody else yelled like Bethlehem. Next morning that precious nephew of her’s sends me a note, and

glad enough I was to meet him—a nasty, dirty, whoreson little wretch—behind Montagu House. Will Esmond was my second, and you may depend we had a tough fight. I was lucky for once, and cut him across the nose. The little beast was not satisfied even then, and Mr. Will put in his holy oar, so the end of it was we had to fight another round.”

“Did you kill him, Arthur?” interrupted his aunt breathlessly.

“Kill him!” with a grunt; “that family don’t die so easily, wish they did; but I gave him a lovely pink through the left arm, and what with his cracked face and his lame arm I’ve stopped his gadding for one while. Well—now do be quiet, aunt—the next thing I heard was that the Walmoden had told her royal friend, and his lordship the Head Supervisor of the Larder wrote to me to say that he no longer required my ser-

vices, and if I called at his office I should receive my pay, and anything I had to say would be heard. Of course I didn't call, not I, and that crack-faced nephew got my place ; one comfort is he has got my mark as well."

" You have done for yourself at last, sir," was the comforting remark of his aunt. " You cannot hope for Court favour for some time now I should think. Your father never got on and was always quarrelling, and you are every inch his son."

" I hope so," added Arthur ; " but I have not finished, you will think better still of me before I have done."

" Arthur, this is dreadful, what else have you been doing ? Are you the fiend incarnate ?" whimpered my lady.

" Can't say, aunt ; anyhow let us console ourselves that I am not a bad imitation at least," replied Mr. Hopeful cheerfully.

“ Well, after I left the Palace, which I did immediately I found that the ministers did not want me, bless them—to perdition, so I went over to the Tories. I always liked the Tories ; the Crosbys were all Tories, were they not, aunt ? ”

“ Yes, and everything else that was unlucky.”

“ Precisely—good dog, good old dawg—well, as I was saying, I got plenty of welcomes, such as they were, for as I’d been in the Palace they thought I might be useful, and actually I was set to write letters. Faugh ! I was not kept at that long, on account of that old put Rochester telling me of my grammar and spelling. As if I cared a d——n about the things, or as if they mattered to a man of quality. I found they were giving me the cold shoulder so I left them and, like the sectarian gentleman who could not get into hell, set up for myself.”

“What do you mean?” questioned his hearer, “set up for yourself?”

“Well, not exactly that, but I joined Kelly’s plot, which amounted to pretty much the same thing. I knew that would be more exciting than play at White’s. I was engaged in that part of the plot that blew up, just my luck; so I changed my name and went to France for a time, but finding myself not much more than suspected I came back to England and to my dear father till it had all blown over. That’s all.”

The old lady raised her head and attempted to look displeased, and failed, for no one could be prouder than she was to hear that Arthur had at length developed the distinctive family failing. That it was a failing could not be doubted, but then it was respectable, nay, almost creditable, having been in the family some six hundred years. How could she be angry with him for doing what

no Crosby had ever failed to do? And then, was it not for the sake of the "King over the water"? Alack! how many brave hearts and noble lives were ready to sacrifice themselves for that selfish youth.

So the old lady's frown turned into a smile as she gave her hand to be kissed.

"For the King o'er the water, Arthur," said she.

"To the gentleman in black velvet," cried Arthur, as he drained the flagon of burgundy.

And the reconciliation was complete.

Then the former part of the story was remembered, and Lady Grassthorpe said,—

"I can forgive you much for this last, boy. If Kelly's plot miscarried, another will bear fruit enough to atone for its failure ten times told. Is this why you were afraid to meet Bancaster?"

"Why, yes. I am suspected *at least*, and

must keep quiet for some time to come. Bancaster would be glad enough to curry favour anyhow, and a rebel is an acceptable morsel to the Hanoverian hog; besides, I know he hates me.'

"Why does he hate you?"

Arthur made no reply, but from the working of his countenance his aunt guessed fairly well for an old woman who was wholly given up to Bishop Burnet and playing cards.

"How did you spend your time after you left the Palace, sir?" she asked sternly.

"Oh, in my usual fashion," quoth my gentleman, lazily fondling the lapdog, an act of supererogation by which he knew he was sure to find some favour with, if not plenary absolution from, his stern-eyed monitress.

"I thought so, sir; drinking, dicing, brawling, and—worse, I suppose. Leave that dog alone and attend to me, please," she added irritably.

“Worse, aunt?” this with great nonchalance.

“You do evil enough, at all events.”

“Yes, I flatter myself I do,” replied Mr. Hopeful. “If everybody did their share as honestly as I do mine there would not be so little work for the parsons.”

“No, sir; nor for the hangman either,” she snapped. “It will be worse for you, Arthur, in the end, you know.”

“My dear aunt, permit me to remind you that you were good enough to inform me of that fact on the occasion of my last most pleasant visit.”

“I tell you every time you come here, but it’s of no use. You will go to the devil as sure as you were born. All the male Crosbys do,” she added reassuringly, with a consolatory sigh.

“Truly, aunt; and as I am bound to make the acquaintance of that estimable

gentleman, what is the good of my spoiling so satisfactory an arrangement by attempting to be better ?" reasoned Arthur.

"Because I want you to break the tradition," said the old lady illogically.

This belief that all the male Crosbys must go to the devil was a favourite theme with the Lady Grassthorpe, and she would cite with infinite gusto multiplied instances of the wickedness of the line, enough to make your hair stand on end to listen to. Under the disturbing glare of her diseased memory, they all became liars, gamblers, roués, and freebooters ; in a word, perfect cesspits of moral obliquity in which bred and throve every unwholesome thing. The devoted Churchman, Arthur's ancestor fifth removed, who helped to the stake heretics by the dozen, became a ferocious hypocrite ; and the lad's great-uncle, who ought to have been in a madhouse, was, according to her, such a

compendium of evil that he might well have been stuck on a pedestal as an exact presentment of Satan, and only a very keen-eyed critic have discovered that it was merely a blood relation.

Arthur was used to this topic, and had tired of it ; so to save himself from being bored, he devoted his attention to the dog and the remains of his burgundy, while his aunt knitted quite half an inch, which had all to come undone again.

“ I shall ask you no more questions, sir,” said the old lady viciously, “ nor shall I give you any more good advice. Of course you will stop here as long as you can. Your uncle will be glad to see you. Bancaster goes to Lord Mountjoy’s to-morrow.”

“ Thanks,” said Arthur, “ then I’ll stop till next Monday. After that I am going to my place for a time.”

“ For how long ? ” quoth the curious old

lady, forgetting that she would not ask any more questions.

“ Few days,” said my gentleman, leisurely turning over the leaves of the first volume of Mr. Theobald’s Shakespeare. “ I dare not stop at home long for some time to come, a couple of months at least. So I shall go away to some quiet out-of-the-world place.”

“ Hum. To Winterbourne ? ”

“ No, aunt, I don’t think so.”

“ The Lord forgive me that lie ! ” thought he ; “ but the old lady would be sure to find out my quarry if I told the truth.” Thus he plumed himself on his security, little dreaming that his aunt’s next remark would blow that security into space, and leave him “ naked and open,” as the ministers say.

“ Who is this girl Cox says you are making eyes at ? ”

“Girl!” said Arthur. “Cox was fooling you.”

“Cox knows better than to fool me, sir ; but you need not tell me if you would rather not. Only I will tell you that——”

CHAPTER VII.

OUR OLD ARISTOCRACY.

WHAT was that row in the hall? Only the "Right Trusty and Right Entirely Beloved Cousin and Counsellor of the King, the High and Mighty Prince, his Grace the Duke of Bancaster, Knight of the Garter, of the Bath, the Thistle, and Groom of the Bedchamber to the Prince of Wales," swearing at his groom — an occurrence so common as hardly to be worth mentioning.

My Lord Grassthorpe and he had come home earlier than was expected, and in evil

tempers because the race-horse his grace had entered, and both had backed, for the Exeter Steeplechase, had fallen lame.

The sound of oaths was right welcome to Arthur and his aunt, for they knew from experience that full ten minutes would be spent over remonstrating with that recalcitrant groom.

Arthur disappeared into the disused "library" — that family sarcophagus in which were deposited, with every outward show of respect, so far at least as the binding is concerned, the remains of all the world's profoundest and most inspiring thought—there to wait until their lordships, having finished their swearing, should condescend to turn their attention from blasphemy to honour the lady of the house with their improving conversation, and amused himself in the interval by drawing the portrait of a deceased gentleman who, presumably suffering

from the heat, had taken off his flesh to sit in his bones.

Just as he was finishing the fingers of the the left hand of his study he heard a loud noise as of a falling body, and, full of curiosity, he applied his eye to the keyhole, solacing his conscience, however, with the reflection that as this house must, in the natural order of things, come to him ; and though it would be in the last degree ungentlemanly to look through another person's keyhole, there could be nothing wrong in a man looking through his own. "Lucky that those two old fools came in just then," he thought, "I should have been cross-examined about 'the fascinating Elsie.' I'll break every rib in Cox's carcass next time I see him, for a meddlesome idiot. I flatter myself I turned her off the scent very neatly by my innocent air and evident astonishment. What a genuine comfort there is in

coming of a lying family—helps one to do the trick so naturally.”

The Right, etc., etc., etc., his Grace the Duke of Bancaster had entered the room and was in process of making his best and most elaborate bow to my Lady Grass-thorpe, who was about returning that salute with a magnificent circular cheese—most fearfully and wonderfully made—when the butler, whose deferential knock had not been heard, entered also. His Grace had bowed in close proximity to the door, which the man swung heavily back, and so was caught by it upon that particular portion of the ducal anatomy upon which his ducal highness was accustomed to take his seat. His Grace, with a “right entirely beloved” and most melodious howl, doubled up and then butted forward with considerable force until he described a semicircle over a footstool which he encountered in the course of

his peregrinations, and finished his ducal, but none the less singular, evolution upon his "right trusty and most honourable" head, which raised a "high and mighty" bump.

Picture the poor man's discomfiture ! His wholesome horror at a lady seeing him in so eminently undignified a position. He would have fainted, for certain, had it not been for the kindly offices of my lord's pointer, which promptly seized him in the region of the hinder portion of the ducal pantaloons, and of the somewhat too officious but doubtless well-intentioned lapdog, which at least created a diversion by running away with the scratch wig of the King's Right Honourable Cousin and Counsellor, which it proceeded forthwith to worry to rags.

The bystanders were in a high state of congested risibility ; they would have given worlds to explode in laughter ; apoplexy

seemed imminent ; but that must be risked, for good breeding sternly forbade the relief which nature demanded.

Only one, who never thought—with his eye at the keyhole at the library door—burst into a peal of hearty laughter.

“ You d——d fool,” shouted his grace, “ what in the name of h—ll did you do that for ? ”——

We regret we cannot finish his Grace’s speech on account of its being more redolent with blasphemies than was thought correct, even in that easy going, easy thinking age.

The poor butler stood like a man astonished at his own prowess, utterly abashed under the storm of abuse which his master and his guest rained upon his devoted head. We wonder whether it occurred to him that he was not to blame, but the hang of the door and my lord duke for his

carelessness. We do not think it did, at all events he knew his place too well to say so ; and stood, foolish and silent, under the accusations heaped on him.

Great folks were no more pitiful, even in the good old days, to poor Jeames than they are to-day. He was a chattel then as he is now ; an automatic, adamantine, sexless, soulless convenience, without flesh and blood, reason, rights or nerves. We only do not beat and swear at him now because it is considered bad form. Lucky Jeames of the nineteenth century !

What nonsense that last paragraph is, says every one who believes that servants are a necessary evil. And in this conviction the Right Trusty and Right Entirely Beloved Cousin and Counsellor of his King most heartily shared.

By this time the butler's lecture is over, and the poor man has retired for more bur-

gundy. His Grace's equanimity is scarcely restored by the discovery that that beast Carlo—my lady's lapdog—has minutely, and with a perseverance worthy of a better cause, subdivided his scratch wig into its component elements. The delinquent is promptly kicked out of the room, and Bancaster fires a volley of his choicest profanities after the retreating form of the yelping offender.

“Hush!” at length quoth my lady, “methinks your grace will scarce mend the matter by your language.”

“Zounds!” replied the accused angrily, “if your ladyship won't excuse my words you must at least allow that there is a good enough reason for them.”

“Never mind words, my lady here comes the burgundy, my Lord Bancaster!” shouted the host cheerily, as he forged

heavily forward with elephantine courtesy to pull a chair to the table.

The unfortunate butler stepped out of his master's way, and, in doing so, trod on her ladyship's favourite corn.

"D——n you for a fool!" screamed her ladyship.

The miserable man put the bottles on the table, and disappeared with remarkable celerity. His exit was hailed with another laugh from the library keyhole, and somehow, for the life of her, her ladyship could not help laughing too. She had a keen sense of humour, that woman!

My lord and his grace were by this time deep in their burgundy, so my lady made them a fine courtesy and retired into the library. Here she found her nephew busily sketching the figure of a lady clad to match the above-mentioned gentleman.

Upon her entrance Arthur looked up and laughed.

“You fool—you idiot—you gaby!” hissed the old lady, snatching the paper upon which he was working from the table and tearing it viciously in pieces; “cannot you go and tell Bancaster you are here? If Grassthorpe had not been drunk would he not have come in here to see who laughed? Come to your rooms at once, I say.”

“I say, it will be awfully dull, aunt! and you might have left me my lady and gentleman for company. There was not much of them, it’s true, but they were better than nothing, and vastly more diverting than some folks I know with more in, or on, them.”

“Then go and show yourself to Bancaster, since you are dying for company,” returned the irate dame.

But she led the way to the north wing, and Sir Arthur Crosby followed her like a dog with a burnt tail going to the funeral of a relation, stopping only to kiss the housemaid Emma under the stairs when his aunt had turned a corner.

CHAPTER VIII.

WHICH ILLUSTRATES THE ART OF POLITE
LETTER WRITING.

ON the whole Sir Arthur Crosby did not have a very pleasant week at Grassthorpe ; he had to keep out of the Duke of Bancaster's way, and his grace betrayed no particular anxiety to leave the place. Now, it is matter of general agreement that keeping close in a couple of rooms, without company, is not a very exciting form of dissipation for a gentleman by birth and without education, and therefore without resource, of such very social habits as our hero ; and to walk abroad with the un-

pleasant probability of a row, which cannot possibly redound to one's credit, is by no means inspiring.

Lord Grassthorpe had heard from the wife of his bosom of my gentleman's peccadillos and consequent troubles, and, as this amiable time-server always sailed close to the wind on principle, he paid a special visit to Arthur's rooms on the night after his arrival, to impress on him the urgent necessity of keeping well out of Bancaster's way. My Lord Grassthorpe was as consistent a turncoat as ever existed, with a fine knack of never being quite in favour with any party. As soon as the Whigs obtained office he hastened to assure them of his humblest service and best good wishes. If the Whigs were kicked out and the Tories came in, lo and behold! the good wishes and best services were tendered to them in as hearty and sincere

a manner as they had been to their opponents. My lord's favourite side was always the side in favour, though he never failed, like the accommodating landlord in a certain book, to see that there was a good deal of reason on both sides.

Like his nephew, he was never much trusted, but not for the same reason. Men in office never failed to like the kindly old sycophant, but they failed to see that his merits were of an order that might be useful to the public. They were sure of his best services while they were in power if they only dangled an honour before him, like a carrot before the nose of the proverbial donkey, so it was not, of course, worth while to pay for what they could have for nothing more substantial than an insinuation.

But the old gentleman never saw this, and veered about with the amiable con-

sistency of a weathercock. Just now he was in high spirits from the recognition of so great a man as his Grace of Bancaster, and had persuaded himself that it must mean at least the very next vacant place in the household. This pleasing dream was to be roughly disturbed by the appearance of Sir Scapegrace ; of whose existence he devoutly wished his grace to be ignorant, especially after his wife's report of his nephew's unwise and questionable proceedings.

So the night after our hero's arrival, as soon as Bancaster had retired—by the aid of a couple of footmen and a stalwart retainer who operated from the rear, to his virtuous couch—he came out of his dressing-room, peered carefully around, and set off to the north wing to interview his nephew.

It is useless our recounting what passed between the two. Suffice it to say, that the conference was conducted on the one side

with the utmost *insouciance*, and on the other with a kind of suppliant, not to say abject, humility ; for my lord thought even his nephew and heir worth conciliating. One plot had failed, but another might succeed ; and then Arthur might, nay must, be a person of some interest and importance whose goodwill would be invaluable.

A young parasite is not a pleasant spectacle ; but, ye gods ! how infinitely more contemptible is an old one, who for sixty years has been eating ineffectual toads and suffering unnecessary snubs for the sake of a few chance thousands or a petty distinction which might be thrown at him as a bone to a dog ! Let us be thankful that we live in another age, that there are no toadies now, no place-hunters, no lick-spittles, no political Judas Iscariots ; nay, that all have learned how much nobler, and every way more satisfactory, it is to give than to receive ;

that the *genus* snob is as extinct as the dodo.

My lord's errand was fairly successful. His nephew readily promised not to do what he particularly objected to doing, although he made a favour thereof; so we will hope that the old gentleman crept back to his room somewhat comforted and reassured.

His heir also went to bed, and passed a pleasant night dreaming, in a complacent fashion, of a pretty face he had left behind him in a prosaic old town, which (the face, not the town) would brighten at seeing him again.

We know an old man who is constantly railing against the vanity of youth, and a pretty big subject he has to descant upon. Youth is vain, and we are willing to hazard our reputation on it that that old gentleman was in his young days as vain as the vainest of his vain contemporaries. To see his

vinous eyes brighten and leer when women are the subject of conversation is more edifying than any sermon that was ever preached on the subject of lasciviousness. With what glee, habited as experience-bought chastity, he hints of what he could tell you, an' if he would ; of what a gay deceiver he, alas, once was ; of what enterprising fellows the young men of his day were ! We verily believe that many a man would willingly forego his reputation as a gay Lothario, upon which he now so prides himself, if he could once but look into the empty eye-sockets of the despicable old age in which such a life eventuates. One cannot help having some sneaking sympathy with a young rake who goes the pace, and really does enjoy the good things of this life ; for although they "endure but for a season," we would nevertheless remind our most pious readers that there *are* "pleasures of sin." But he must

indeed be a Samaritan—or a fool—who can find aught but loathing for an ancient roué who rolls as a sweet morsel under his tongue the reminiscence of deeds that should make his soul laugh in mockery at itself. Might not another petition be added to the litany, that we might *forget*, as well as repent of, our sins?

And what in the name of goodness is the meaning of the foregoing rigmarole? Merely, dear reader, our apology for craving your sympathy for our hero, who is, for aught we are prepared to aver to the contrary, as choice a rascal as may be; and our disclaimer of any sympathy whatever with that heartless old roué who goes to bed chuckling at his nephew's description of the latter's salacious venialities.

For the next two or three days Arthur got up and took his walks abroad early, then kept his room till dinner time (three o'clock

P.M.), when he could order his horse and go a-riding in safety along sequestered byeways. After the second day, however, all the halo of romance with which this life of secrecy was invested, vanished; and our friend decided that lying in hiding was confoundedly dull work; nor did it take long for him to persuade himself that it was a most dishonourable thing to do. The more lax a man is in his morals, the more strict he is about his "honour." A man who will cheat his tailor, seduce his housemaid, play cards for his friend's money, or underwrite a bubble company and so become surety for a swindle, is most particular to let you clearly understand that he is a "man of honour." It would be an interesting document, if drawn by some competent person, which would present to the world an inventory of practices which are honourable and those which are not; and also an essay on those

things which are sometimes the one and sometimes the other, finally specifying such as are both. Such a list would be a revelation in moral etiquette, but would be a doubtful advantage, as we each have our pet code, which we are most unwilling to allow is other than immaculate.

Yes, Arthur drew the line at hiding ; that was a fence his "honour" could not take. On the third day he had come to the conclusion that any further concealment would eternally disgrace him, acting upon which sapient reasoning he took the high road in his ride. Luckily for him, the day was showery, or his grace had resolved to visit his friend Lord Mountjoy; and had he done so they must inevitably have met. As it happened, his braggadocio course fell decidedly flat ; so he returned to his retirement sulky and damp. Pleasant old-fashioned rooms enough were these in the north wing ;

but to a gentleman of restless habits, with a profound distaste for his own society and with a distinctly bowing acquaintance, which he had no wish to cultivate, with his own thoughts, the agreeable rooms were little better than prison cells.

Gentlemen of the middle of the last century had not too many means of amusement. Take away hunting and card-playing, and what was there left worth living for? No 'spot-shot' to study, no 'Pelicans' with which to while away the holy Sabbath hours in watching a 'nigger' punch a white man's face until his Maker could hardly recognise it as His handiwork; no 'Gaiety girls' to mash, no 'spoof' to satisfy the nobler aspirations of the soul, life must indeed have been a howling wilderness.

Indoors and alone the gentleman of the eighteenth century must endure the tortures of absolute idleness. His education had

been too superficial to instil a taste for reading, so he never opened a book ; music and painting were unknown quantities in the calculations of a “ gentleman ;” and no one pretending to that title could ever fall so low as to attempt anything useful.

So Arthur passed the evening in idleness and grumbling. There had been venison at dinner, he was sure by the smell (this, by the way, was a mistake), and his aunt had not sent him any. It was a hard world ! Having observed his partiality to Emma, the housemaid and the only pretty domestic the old lady permitted about the place, she had not failed to arrange that another should attend her visitor’s rooms, and to warn the beauteous abigail that if she was found in the north wing during Sir Arthur Crosby’s stay the exterior of the old hall would infallibly be her portion. This was of course matter for further self-commiseration. Of a

truth life was very bitter. Poor Arthur ! the portion of a cockchafer on a pin, or of a stickleback in an all-too-circumscribed gallipot was pleasant by comparison, immured in this hospitable dungeon, he was spending a *mauvais quart d'heure*.

Happy thought ! Why had it not occurred before ? He would write to Elsie. Easier said than done. Letters were scarcer then than now, consequently the art of letter writing was brought to perfection by the few and totally neglected by the many ; our hero belonged to the latter class. Paper was soon procured, but a pen was a serious consideration, and the finished production was a triumph of blots, scratches, and blunders.

It is not, however, with the caligraphy or orthography that we have to do, and though we cannot see the relevance of the letter to our story, it is nevertheless so unique a

specimen that we take the liberty of reproducing it.

“Honored Madam,” it began. This phrase cost no little cogitation. “Miss would be proper,” he argued; “madam was so stiff.” You will wonder why it was so difficult to write so simple a missive, surely such a young spark as he must have written many notes to his dear friends at his Majesty’s Theatre in Drury Lane, or at the gardens at Marylebone, or Hockley-in-the-Hole? Of course he had, but writing to a respectable woman was a feat he had never attempted before, and which challenged his resources to their utmost.

“Honored madam,

“I take up my penn to inform you that I am an inhabitent of uncle’s poorhouse at Grassthorpe, and that I am quite well as I hope you are at present.”

“There,” thought he, “that’s vastly good.

D——n it ! ” he added, “ her old beldam of a mother would raise h—ll at my writing to her, if I sent it secretly and she discovered it. No, I’ll send it openly, and say that I write to her to tell the Tylers to get my rooms ready for me. That’s the conceit ! ” So the letter continued :—

“ As I am uncurten of the address of my good frends the Tylers I take the leberty of writin to aske that you will inform theme that I shall be att Winterbourne on ye sixteenth day from the date of yis letter, shoulde nothin prevent of which I will giv *you* notis.”

This sentence added not a little to the vanity of our scribe ; not only was it very choicely worded, so that she might show it all round the town without compromising him, but, if anything intervned which prevented his returning, it left an opportunity for him to exercise his ingenuity, and still

further disturb poor Elsie's peace of mind with another letter.

If they were London folks, he reasoned, they would not for a moment believe his 'cock and bull' story of having forgotten the address, but being mere chawbacons no lump of lie was too big for them to swallow.

"I desire that my best respects may be given to the formentioned Tylers and also to your good father and muother. I have the honor to remaine, madam, with the utmoste admeration of your talens,

"Your most obedient humble servante,

"ARTHUR CROSBY."

Now we ask any respectable parent, guardian, or head mistress of a select ladies' seminary, if the above is not a most proper, unsentimental, and every way correct letter for a young person to receive? Is there an

objectionable word or phrase in it, anything to raise a blush on the cheek of maiden modesty? Barring the bad spelling and a few trifling lapses of grammar, is it not a letter you would be proud to have written yourself?

Arthur spoilt it all by adding a postscript on another sheet of paper in a more affectionate and less affected tone.

"P.S.—Dear littel Elsie, I am dam dul here, as I kep my roome on ackount of an olde chuf who is staing hear, an who I do nott wante to se. I shall be gladd to git bak to Winterbourne an to you. An I hop that you wil be gladd to see me. My uncle wil franke yis, he bein a pere.

"Yure lovin,

"A. C."

He had just finished this postscript and copied it on a fresh sheet of paper when his

uncle, who had seen the last of his tipsy guest for that evening, came to say "Good-night" to his nephew. How he laughed over the letter and its postscript to be sure!

Arthur got rather offended; he had prided himself upon his effusions, and thought them perfect, and here was an old gentleman actually sniggering at them. However, he gulped down his wrath and said,—

"Frank this for me please, uncle."

"I don't know that I ought, sir," replied the old man, giggling. "'Pon my honour it's positively indecent for me to frank a letter of this kind."

"This kind—what kind?" demanded Arthur, angrily. "What's the matter with the letter?"

"Not much, *not much*," responded his amused relative. "It might be better spelt to be sure, and the grammar seems to me capable of improvement, but they are well

enough for a person of quality. How dare you call mine a poorhouse, sir?"

"Faith, uncle, I thought it was the proper thing to say."

"Hm! I do not know whether you were not right after all; if it is not a poorhouse we are at least paupers who live in it. Are you very fond of her nails, boy?" grinned the old man, as he looked at the last sentence of the epistle proper.

"Nails! Gad's life, what do you mean, uncle?"

"Simply that you state that you have the utmost admiration of her 'talens,' so I suppose you mean her nails, to be sure. This letter was not sentimental enough, so you must needs write a postscript. I would not tell her who the old chuff is, if I were you, even if you are asked," he added, as he wrote his signature on the outside. "By the way, Arthur, I might as well tell you, it is not

quite the thing in polite society for gentlemen to use expletives in their letters to women. I tell you this because it may be of use to you if you should ever have anything to do with a respectable female."

"Damme! this is a respectable female," cried Mr. Arthur.

"At present," finished the other. "This life is all very well in its way, my lad, but it cannot last for ever, and Grassthorpe, title and all, will come to you. I have done little enough for its honour, Heaven knows, but I should dearly like you to be the first respectable man of the line. I was wild in my young days, but your aunt Grassthorpe tamed me down—yes, your aunt tamed me down, and your wife will do as much for you, I trust. I think it is high time you began to look out for one and left off your present ways of living before you are quite undone."

“Would you like me to marry this girl?” asked the nephew, poising the letter on his forefinger.

“Well—not exactly,” said Lord Grass-thorpe, hesitatingly, “not exactly. What I mean is that you ought to marry someone. This girl is better than none. What is she, a peasant?”

‘And a very pretty peasant too.’

“Precisely so. A very pretty *peasant*, I dare say. So much the better for you. I had very much rather you marry this girl, supposing her character is good, than not marry at all. Men may be pardoned for marrying beneath them though women it seems may not. If you go on in your present mode of living the chances are that you may lose your head, or something equally unimportant, or get hanged if you have luck, who knows? and I don’t particularly wish the title should become extinct

with you. Still, I would prefer you marrying someone of your own rank and with money. Would this *inamorata* of yours bring you any fortune ?”

“ My fiddlestick, I don’t know.”

“ Well, good-night, lad ; keep out of the way for a couple of days more.”

“ Keep out of the way !” muttered Arthur, as his uncle closed the door, “ that would be well enough if it did not mean keep one’s room and be miserable. Beastly dishonourable thing to tell one to do—cowardly, by Jove ! No man shall call me a coward without having his head broken ! The old man is a kind-hearted old heathen after all. Cox must have brought a fine account of my goings on, a meddling old Jesuit, stap my vitals ! No ; I do not propose marrying just at present, dear uncle, and when I do—*when* I do, I think I should like a leetle money, as you say. I’ll wager

now the old boy meant enough to set us both on our legs."

With this he thought he might as well go to bed, which he did, and slept the sleep commonly supposed to be the exclusive monopoly of the innocent.

Whether he would have carried his hare-brained design of making a public appearance into execution or not we cannot say; but he did not, on account of an unlucky catastrophe to his first experiment. Big with his foolhardy resolve, he neglected to take his walk next morning before breakfast, and, in accordance with his preconceived idea, must needs go out just at the time the Duke of Bancaster and his host would be returning from their matutinal visit to the stud farm; that is provided they had managed to sleep off their overnight potions in time to see the horses before they went out to exercise.

Arthur wandered aimlessly along the trim and ghostly walks of the high-walled garden, between overgrown square-cut hedges, which seemed to have been carefully cultivated for the specific purpose of preventing anyone from seeing a yard further than his nose and hiding the flowers on either side from view, quite characteristic of the walled-up, exclusive, self-contained and formal spirit of the age, which even thus failed entirely to obscure the beauteous lives and noble souls that flowered in rich profusion within these impenetrable parterres. At length he entered the park, when, on turning into one of the principal walks, he beheld my Lords Bancaster and Grassthorpe approaching, apparently engrossed in conversation. All Arthur's 'Bobadil' bravery vanished into his boots, and did not enable

him to meet their lordships face to face. So, being unperceived, he slipped nimbly behind a tree, and, being seized with an insane curiosity, he waited listening for their going past.

Listeners never hear any good of themselves, as Arthur discovered when he overheard the Duke say,—

“And I assure you, my lord, this misguided young gentleman after insulting good Lady Yarmouth actually had the assurance to present himself at court on the occasion of the very next levée, and should say to my Lord of Salisbury that kept women must not expect to be treated as ladies! Had he apologized, my lady, who is the most forgiving person in the world, might have kept him in his place; but instead he must needs say to Dr. Hoadly that kept women must not expect to be treated

as ladies. Dismissal from office, of course, followed——”

This was all Arthur heard, but we promise he had had a surfeit. The sin of hiding seemed quite venial, for evidently one should not tempt Providence.

He retired to his room for the rest of the day, and employed himself with exemplary diligence in making a whole army of skeletons, the only figures his limited talents enabled him to depict with anything approaching to accuracy. We hereby recommend all unskilful draughtsmen to take to skeletons; they are easy to limn, and effective—very.

In two days the Duke left Grassthorpe, after which Arthur was of course free to come out of his cell; but his uncle was so supremely disgusted with him, by reason of the Duke's version of his misdeeds, that he speedily took his departure for some more

lively spot ; and punctually, on the sixteenth day, he redeemed his promise to Mistress Elsie, and presented himself at the house of the worthy blacksmith, the Mayor of Winterbourne.

CHAPTER IX.

THE LITTLE FOXES THAT SPOIL THE GRAPES.

"ELSIE, here is a letter for thee," cried her father, one evening, a few days after the events recorded in our last chapter,

"A letter for me!" exclaimed Elsie. "I wonder whom it can be from."

"Can't say, I be sure, lass," replied her father, whose hands were wandering about in his capacious pockets feeling for the document in question; "but it's for thee, sure, enou'."

"What's that thee hast for our Elsie?" questioned Mrs. Steele, who, coming into

the parlour at that moment, only caught the last sentence.

“A letter, misses.”

“A letter, indeed! Mercy on us, who should she be having a letter from, I should like to know. Where did’st get it?”

Mr. Steele had by this time found the missive, and, having given it to Elsie, paused until she had taken a good look at the cover before he replied, “From the postee, to be sure.”

“Any fool could tell that,” was Mrs. Steele’s amiable rejoinder. “But where did’st see the postee?”

Mr. Steele pulled himself together, as a man who should prepare himself for an undertaking to tell a story, which Elsie foresaw would be a long one for her father was notoriously long-winded and prolix, and so deferred opening the letter until she had heard it.

Like many other people, she felt a vague little nervous fluttering in the region of her heart as to what her unknown correspondent might have to say, and the more gladly availed herself of the brief respite.

"In the High Street," answered the Alderman; "it was on this wise: you see I went to the 'Red Lion' along with Farmer Jones's harness, as I knowed that the market being over, it was mor'n likely for him to be there loike. Samson should have gone, but Jones be'ant none too ready with his money, and I thought'n might say as how that he didn't know it wor quite safe to pay Samson."

"Did you see Jones?" interrupted his better half.

"Yees," said the Alderman, dubiously; "but——"

"But what, Steele?"

"But I only got two pun' and a promise out o' 'ee."

"*His* promises ain't worth much," said Mrs. Steele. "I suppose as you said that it didn't matter. That's just like you, for all the world. Haven't I warned you over and over not to trust him, an' told you not to make his harness till you was paid for the last? If you go on this gait we shall all come to the poorhouse, that's for certain."

"Never mind about Farmer Jones, mother," said Elsie; "I want to hear about the letter."

"Yes, my lass, about the letter for sure," assented her father. "I was just a comin' to that'en. Now, as I wor a sayin', I see Farmer Jones, and we was havin' a bit o' talk, when up comes the Salisbury mail, and the guard he got down with the letters, and gives 'em to Bythe, who was a-waitin', and comes and begins a-talkin' to Jones and me. Well, Bythe comes up to me a minute or two arter and says, 'Here's a letter for your

daughter, Master Steele,' says he. 'Never!' says I ; but I takes 'en, and saw as t'wor for thee, my lass. So I says, 'How much to pay?' and he says, 'Nothing.' "

"Nothing to pay!" exclaimed Elsie and her mother in a breath, the latter adding a remark that Mr. Bythe was drunk, she was sure, as he always was.

"Well, I thought it wor a rum go, and so I said; but he says 'it's franked.' I didn't quite know what'n meant, so I says, 'Yes, it be,' at a venture, like. Then he says, 'Who ever paid for a franked letter?' 'Well,' says I, 'I doan't exactly know; but I should like to have a lot o' they franks just to send round the bills to my customers.' I said that for Jones; but, bless you, he none took it, not he."

"Not he," echoed Mrs. Steele. "There ain't none so deaf as them as wonner hear."

“ ‘How do’ee get ’em?’ says I. A lot of fellows as had come by the coach burst out a larfin’ at I, and one of ’em says to me, ‘Are you a lord?’ he says. ‘No,’ says I. ‘Are you a Member of Parliament?’ says he. ‘No,’ says I, ‘I bean’t.’ So then he says, ‘You can’t frank letters,’ says he. They had got the horses in, so they chaps jumped up on the coach agen, all a larfin’, and I felt rather silly like. As they drove off the guard shouts out, ‘Your letter’s from a lord, to be sure.’ Mr. Crosthwaite were by, and he saw me lookin’ at the letter; so he says, ‘Let me look at the letter,’ says he, and when he’d looked he says, ‘It’s from Lord Viscount Grassthorpe; he wor a Minister once.’ With that I thought as I’d better come home. So all the town knows about thy letter, Elsie.”

Elsie made no comment; she and her mother were examining the exterior of the

letter, with its frank and large armorial seal. After a long inspection Mrs. Steele suggested that Elsie should open it and see what the great man could want with her.

She did so, but a hasty glance showed her a second sheet directed to "Miss Elsie," and, with a quickened beating of the heart, she instinctively stooped to pick up her handkerchief, and as she did so thrust the second missive into the bosom of her dress, for future and further investigation. It was only a trifling deception, hardly worth our noticing, perhaps; and, in sooth, we should have been but too pleased to pass it by unheeded, save by a wink of recognition, only for its effect upon Elsie herself: how supremely conscious and uncomfortable the little maiden became all at once! How hot that hidden letter felt; it seemed to burn her very flesh.

"Why," she exclaimed, after hastily scan-

ning the epistle proper, "it's from Mr. Crosby!"

"From Mr. Crosby!" gasped her mother; "what does he do writing to you?"

Elsie handed over the letter in reply, which the honest Alderman and his wife read with no little delight and immense difficulty.

It is an altogether enjoyable and satisfactory thing to correspond with a real live lord, and though Arthur Crosby was not the rose, he had been near it. "I don't fancy the spelling is quite right," said Mr. Steele diffidently.

"Nonsense, father; don't you think Mr. Crosby would be more likely to know about spelling than you?"

This was true, he was more likely to, though as a matter of fact he did not; so Mr. Steele, wishful to keep up appearances, and feeling considerably snubbed, went into his shop.

Mrs. Steele read it through twice to see if she could not find something in it that might be grumbled at. Her non-success hardly improved her temper, although it must be confessed that there was something mollifying in the frank on the outside.

“That’s all nonsense about his forgetting the Tylers’ address,” she worried; “the man is not such a fool as not to know that a letter addressed to the Mayor would be sure to find him.”

“Perhaps he didn’t know that Mr. Tyler is Mayor,” suggested Elsie mildly.

“Didn’t know, fiddlesticks; Tyler’s family are not so ashamed of it as to keep it in the background. If folks don’t know it, it ain’t for want of their telling. This young man is not such a fool as not to have picked up that precious bit of information in all the months he’s been about here, and his

memory's good enough when it suits him, that I'll go bail for."

"But, mother, you see he says in the letter he did forget," said Elsie.

"Well, child ; and what of that ?"

"Why—er—if he said so, why—of course, he—did forget."

"Of course, miss ; an' *I* see no 'of course' about it," retorted the mother.

"But *I* do, unless you mean to say that Mr. Crosby is a liar," flashed out Elsie, at length thoroughly aroused.

"Hoity-toity ! and if *I* do, what then ?" asked her mother.

"I don't believe it, that's all," Elsie retorted fiercely ; "it's not true, and you have no right to say it."

"Say what ?" asked Mrs. Steele, genuinely surprised.

"Why such wicked, cruel, unjust slanders," returned Elsie.

Then, aghast at her own temerity, she moved unsteadily towards the stairs, up which she groped her way with reeling head, as though she were unused to the place. At length she reached her room. It was growing a little dark. Elsie shivered, sat down, and looking vacantly into the opposite corner of the room as if she were gazing at it for the first time, seemed undecided whether she wanted to laugh or was going to cry, and finally compromised the matter by doing both.

“By'r'lady! mercy on us now, but who would have thought it?” ejaculated Mrs. Steele, when she had seen the last of her daughter's figure as it vanished up the staircase. Overcome with amazement she sank into a chair, where she sat solemnly shaking her head and repeating at intervals, “who would have thought it?” Slowly a great wave of motherly sympathy gathered in the

worthy woman's heart as a vision of her own romantic girlhood—sternly repressed into her matter-of-fact life of routine until it had hidden itself, as she firmly believed for ever, under the nagging and querulous manner which only veiled a nature overflowing with sympathy and love—passed before her.

“Poor child ! poor child !” and two scalding tears forced their way through ducts that had almost hardened by long disuse.

Meanwhile, what of Elsie ? She had dried her tears and stopped, by an effort of will, that ague-like laughter which had in it no merriment, and, leaning her head against the mullions of the dim window, aching all over as if she had been beaten until she was bruised, she passed steadily in review all the bitter truths her mother's words had forced before her, one by one. What a long time it seemed since her father produced that letter from his pocket ! How

quiet the house seemed! Where was her mother? How would she greet her when next they met? Her mother! Elsie shivered again. Her mother knew her secret! Yes, it *was* her secret, although she had scarcely realised it before.

She loved Arthur Crosby, and the knowledge made her feel suddenly old, and grave with a strange gravity. For, despite her faith, she knew that her idol was unworthy the adoration she could not but lavish upon it; and yet, perceiving its unworthiness, she could not withhold the incense of her heart.

"I could have gone on loving him," she murmured, wearily rocking herself to and fro—"gone on for ever, without wishing for any return if only no one had known. I love him! I love him! Would to God I had never seen him! I might have married some country fool, like other

girls ; or, better still, I might have been heart-whole, and never known what love was. But now—now—I wish I had died before I had ever heard his voice ; and yet I know I only live in the hope of hearing it once more. He is far above me ; yes, he is a gentleman, and I am only a saddler's daughter ; but can I help that ? Why should one person be better than another ? Why was I born, or not born a lady ? ”

And the darkness deepened in the room, and the autumn wind sighed mournfully in the bare branches of the trees from which the summer leaves had almost fallen.

So Elsie sat in the dark and wept and made moan for her hero, and for all her tears her heart did not grow lighter.

The girl knew a good deal more of Arthur's character than her mother did. She was aware, to some extent, of that

gentleman's lax notions of honour, as she understood the term. How she had acquired that knowledge it would be difficult to say ; perhaps by instinct, perhaps by intuition, perhaps—who knows ?—by sympathy.

And as Elsie looked into her own soul's eyes, she saw there written in letters of fire a story which made her shudder with sudden affright and look hastily all round the little peaceful room, as though she might have seen a fearsome sight, a sight which when a woman once sees she can never be young again.

“ Yes,” she said, almost in a whisper, as if she were afraid of hearing her own words, “ I love him, and he is a gentleman, and I am only a common country girl—and I cannot help it.”

Then, as if she had shut down the lid of a casket which contained a treasure that might have been the evidence of a crime,

Elsie pulled the oar of reflection into the little boat of her conscience—and drifted.

* * * * *

“Wife,” said the saddler, as he woke in the night, “wife, art sleeping?”

“No, James.”

“Didst hear the weird? It be powerful wind; its moaning makes me feel quite scart.”

And the worthy saddler addressed himself again to sleep.

But the mother knew that what her goodman had mistaken for the soughing of the wind was the sobbing of their child in the darkness.

CHAPTER X.

THE ROAD TO HOCKLEY.

ELSIE firmly believed that her mother had discovered her love for Arthur ; but herein she was not altogether correct. It is true that on the first blush Mrs. Steele had been disposed to believe that her daughter was seriously smitten ; but maturer reflection convinced her that she was mistaken. As we have indicated, Mrs. Steele was in her girlish days not only the victim of a somewhat severe attack of calf-love, from which she was at the time firmly persuaded that she should never recover, but repeated subsequent seizures

had manifested themselves as symptoms of a romantic disposition. Reflecting upon these sentimental reminiscences of her own young days, she so far modified her first conclusion as to be satisfied that that was not likely to prove fatal in Elsie's case from which her mother had so happily recovered. Mrs. Steele was a capable woman but not a wise mother, and, believing as she did, she concluded that to say anything to Elsie on the subject would only be to run the risk of fanning the smouldering embers into a blaze.

Whether she would have acted as she did had she realized the truth is another matter. Probably she would not, but that is neither here nor there. "I am not going to interfere," said Mrs. Steele to herself. "Elsie is a good girl, and pretty sensible as girls go; she will soon find out that Mr. Crosby's not worth much

for all his glitter. Lord bless the girl! she'll soon get over it, and what she can see in that ill-tempered, sneering puppy is what caps me. Philip Rose is as good-looking, a deal pleasanter, and much richer, I be bound, for they as wears gold on the outwards of their pockets don't carry over much in the innards, let alone Philip's bein' so fond o' Elsie. I'll aye, an' let 'em be, she'll soon tire of that fellow, and then she'll be all the more ready to have Phil. Bless her ; but she'll make him a good wife, when she's done with her skitting."

And Mrs. Steele drew a comforting picture of Elsie in her future home ; the roomy old farmhouse of which Phil was the owner, standing in a wooded glade, with its own homelands all about it. But she forgot that Phil's hands were brown and coarse, with nails which never would come clean ; and that Arthur Crosby had hands white as the

dimity in her linen-press, with pink tinted filbert nails; that Phil spoke with a broad accent, and that Elsie loved him as a brother; whilst Arthur Crosby was a man of fashion, whose speech was as elegant as his face was handsome, and that Elsie certainly could not regard him with feelings that were strictly sisterly.

Elsie quickly discovered that her mother did not realize her love for Arthur, so the little maiden began to take advantage of her knowledge. She spoke openly of him more than once to her mother; she praised him or she blamed him, and talked as coolly of him as if he had been of the utmost indifference to her. It was rather hard to do at first, for her mother looked her steadily in the face as she spoke; but Elsie's eyes did not drop; she managed to keep her countenance while she returned her mother's gaze, and Mrs.

Steele gave a satisfied "humph," and was happy.

"If the girl cared for him she couldn't have talked of him in that off-hand manner," thought Mrs. Steele. "All I've got to do is to be quiet, and she'll be Phil's wife yet. Lucky I didn't take on about yon other fellow."

The few days before Arthur's expected return passed a little slowly; the weather was dull and Elsie was not very well. Still, neither the rain nor her headache sufficed to keep her at home on the last day. She took some flowers that her mother had gathered to the Tylers' house, and satisfied herself that Arthur's rooms had been made comfortable.

She persuaded Hetty to go out of the room once or twice on some fanciful errand while she made various little alterations which she imagined would please his

capricious highness's taste. Then she administered a little judicious flattery to Hetty, and made herself so generally agreeable to the family that before she left even Mrs. Tyler believed that Elsie was not a designing minx, but a very nice girl; and little Thomas, *ætat* twelve, privately informed Hetty, as he was going to bed, that he had quite made up his mind up not to marry anyone in the world but Elsie; and he never, never would, never, never could, change; which reiterated declaration failed to impress the imperturbable Hetty, as he had said precisely the same thing with regard to another young lady only a fortnight before.

By the time Samson came to fetch Elsie home they were all more friendly and on better terms with one another and themselves than they had been for a very long time.

The night was dark and the roads muddy,

so Elsie took the apprentice's arm and chatted away to him just as she did in those dear days before the witch's frolic. Poor Samson ! he was fairly unnerved, and so delighted that he could hardly speak ; and as at the best of times his conversational powers were limited, it is to be feared that his companionship was not of the liveliest order.

When Elsie flung open her chamber window on the following morning the air was still, high, and bright ; the sunlight flooded the room. Elsie had lost her headache, and her heart was singing in jubilant fashion. Still the day seemed to pass slowly. Hetty came in the afternoon, but could not stop for a dish of tea as she must help her mother cook Mr. Arthur's supper, and the Salisbury coach was expected at six o'clock. Elsie would dearly have liked to help cook that supper, which she was vain enough to be-

lieve she could have done a little better than anyone else.

Elsie drank her tea in silence, and then carelessly announced that she was going for a walk.

“Where art going, my lass ?” asked her father.

“To Hockley, father,” responded Elsie ;
“to see Aunt Mary.”

Now Aunt Mary was Phil’s mother, and Hockley was the village where Phil’s farm was situate. Mrs. Steele was delighted, and a bit surprised ; it was not often that Elsie would go to Aunt Mary’s, and she rarely or never proposed to go there of her own free will. There were three good reasons for this, the first being the distance, Hockley was a good two miles walk ; the second reason was Aunt Mary herself, who was sharp-spoken and seemed to enjoy nothing so much as scolding her niece ; and thirdly, and

this was the chief reason, Phil was there, and insisted on bothering her with his clumsy compliments and exuberant love.

To do Elsie justice, she had always discouraged the crowds of swains who were eternally insisting on throwing themselves at her feet, and Phil most decidedly and almost cruelly ; but the good fellow utterly refused to take “ no ” for an answer, and the breath of his life was simply a silent offer.

“ I think thou hadst better not go,” said Mr. Steele mildly ; “ for the lanes ’ull be dirty after the rain, and it’s a goodish bit walk for thee, mor’n specially as thou hast none been o’er well o’ late.”

“ If the lanes are muddy I’ll go by the road, father,” said Elsie merrily ; “ and I’ll warrant me but I’ll make Phil carry me over the brook.”

Steele was going to make some further objection, and began “ But—— ”

“Let the girl go,” interrupted his wife; “the walk ’ll do her good, and Phil will see her home or send her on the horse with the man. You go, Elsie, and stop all night if you are tired and have a mind to. And mind and ask Mary when a cow’s a-goin’ to calve as I want some bastings, and tell Phil to send me a couple of fowls next market day, and—well, never mind, that’s as much as you’ll remember this while, I’ll be bound.”

“I expect it is,” said Elsie; “still, I’ll try and remember this time.”

Elsie was noted for always forgetting at least one thing in three.

“Hadn’t Mattie better go with you?” suggested her father.

“I should have thought thou’dst known by this time that I can never spare Mattie on this evening o’ the week. I suppose you’d like me to fold all the things myself, eh? You go and get ready, lass, and don’t

waste thy time listening to thy father, but get thee gone as soon as you can."

When Elsie had gone Mrs. Steele turned to her husband and said, "I suppose thou'dst like Mattie to shut Phil's mouth. Thou said'st thoud'st like him for thy daughter, and a pretty way thou takest to get 'en. Let the lass go alone and give the lad a chance."

"I did not think o' that, good wife," said the alderman, "but Phil won't do hisself good to my thinkin' by worrying the girl."

"You mind the things thou dost understand, and leave them alone. There, there's Mr. Brison wants thee in the shop."

Steele was accustomed to be ruled by his wife and Elsie in all matters outside his business, so he said nothing but went to his customer.

Elsie was soon ready, and very pretty she looked as she tripped down the staircase,

arrayed in her big hat and gay-coloured cloak, and very tenderly her father and mother kissed her as she departed with messages destined never to be delivered.

As her father had said, the lane was muddy, but not so muddy as to prevent her keeping her boots fairly clean if she took care, which she didn't; and in our opinion even in bad weather the lane was infinitely nicer than the high road, as well as being much nearer. The hedgerows were perfect masses of ruddy greenery, the little round cobs were just beginning to peep brown and white, the hips and haws were turning red, the brackens were becoming hard and deepening into a rich purple brown; in fact, the whole way was a wealth of beauty and colour, such as only an English lane can present. Then a little streamlet ran alongside, and the path went between sandstone rocks; here and there were a number of tiny waterfalls,

each, however, large enough to send forth a merry little song.

Again the streamlet would cross the road, and stepping stones, all wet and mossy, were the only way. And in one place was a depression, and there lay a long shallow pool, through which only carts and horsemen could go, while those who walked had to climb the bank and thread a narrow tract amid bracken and gorse. It was so pleasant to stand on this path and watch the horses stopping to drink as they crossed the pool, and to hear the splashing of the water when they moved. Elsie stopped a long time here watching the minnows as they darted hither and thither, and pulled herself a little nosegay of fern and late harebells.

Trees bordered the lane all the way then, but now, alas ! rugged oak and stately elm have been "improved " out of the way ; the little stream, too, has been diverted into a

another course, straight and formal like a poor little starveling canal; and the lane itself has been widened and drained, and macadamized, with tar pavements and man-holes complete, and eligible villa residences border it on either side. We like it best—may we be pardoned the depravity—as it was in the years of long ago, in Elsie's time.

All down the long lane she had been singing blithely, in the gladness of her heart, in a voice which if not strong was fresh, sweet, and good to listen to; but she hushed her song before she crossed the home close which lay between the lane and the farmhouse, for she saw Aunt Mary—no wonder she stopped her song—and Phil in the farmyard, critically inspecting a little lame lamb, and she knew of old time that her aunt seriously disapproved of all singing, at least of all except such tunes as the “Old Hun-

dredth," sung to a doleful psalm. Elsie would have hid her flowers had she been able to, but she feared that the quick eyes of her aunt had already detected these gauds of vanity.

CHAPTER XI.

KIN BUT NOT KIND.

AUNT and cousin were, in their way, really glad to see Elsie, and each showed it accordingly; the woman by a cold kiss and a remark anent the mud on Elsie's shoes, and Phil by blushing violently, dropping her hand as if it burnt, and by muttering something which sounded like "Gadzooks."

"Well, come in, Elsie; only mind you rub your boots on yon straw. The house was only washed down this morning, an' I'm not goin' to have it cleaned again to-day, I can tell 'ee; and throw those flowers away, child, afore you come inside. They'll only

make a litter about the place. I can't think what you want to pluck such rubbish for."

"They are not rubbish, and I'm not going to throw them away, Aunt Mary," rejoined Elsie. "I shall take them home."

"Sake's alive! and what shall you do with them then?" questioned Aunt Mary.

"I shall put them in water in my own room," said the girl.

"An' thy mother will let thee! Well, she were allus easy; but I did not think she were that soft. Howsumnever, never mind that now. Leave those things outside, and come in," she added, as she saw the girl's eyes flash at the reflection on her mother.

"I shall not come in, thank you," said Elsie.

"Lord bless the girl! why not? Ain't we good enough for you?"

"I am afraid I am not good enough for you, Aunt Mary," said Elsie quietly.

"Go in, Elsie, and never mind mother," put in her cousin. "She don't mean what she says. Go in, lass, and think no more about it."

"No, thank you; I don't wish to go in," said Elsie. "Aunt Mary can scold me here quite as well as indoors. I never manage to please her. I might just as well be always doing something disgraceful; it makes me feel miserable to be grumbled at all the while. If I like flowers, why shouldn't I gather them and have them in my room if I choose? They can't interfere with any one else, surely!"

Poor little Elsie! The tears would start to her eyes, for she felt she had been hardly used; and so did Phil, but he durst not say so for the life of him. So he chirruped soothingly,—

“Never mind, Elsie. Never thee mind, lass.”

“But she should mind,” said his mother. “She ought to be thankful, instead of going in a passion, when she is told of her faults. I’m not going to be severe, lass; but thou dost many things that I don’t approve of, and it’s my duty to tell ’ee so.”

“Never mind telling her so, now,” said the peacemaker; “she don’t come very often, and we shouldn’t quarrel when she do. Come and see the pigs, Elsie, and the new pony.”

“No, thank you; not to-day, Phil, thank you,” said Elsie gratefully. “I want to get home as soon as I can. Besides, I should like to hear anything further aunt may have to say.”

“Philip, there’s Martin West wants you,” said his mother. “Thee’dst best go and speak to him.”

“And now, Elsie,” continued she, as Phil, who had been long trained to implicit obedience, turned away, “I maun e’en tell you that I have a great deal more agen you which it is my duty to tell ’ee. Thou’st seen enough o’ th’ Bible to know it says we are to tell each other our faults in love. Ah, Elsie, my lass, if thou didst but know as much o’ the spirit as thou dost o’ the letter !” Here the worthy “Christian” heaved a sigh of pious pity.

“Never mind the Bible,” interrupted Elsie impatiently. “Tell me what you have got against me and have done with it.”

“Elsie, woman, dost know what thou art saying ? Art a heathen ? ‘Never mind the Bible,’ indeed !”—and it would be impossible to convey an adequate idea of the horror that trembled in the woman’s words. “Pray, miss, what would you have

me mind if I'm not to mind the Bible? 'Never mind the Bible'! I tell thee solemnly that if thou does not repent, thou'lt be damned! Thou wilt, for sure."

"So you've told me before, aunt. Now tell me what you have against me. I never come here but you nag and scold me about something."

"Yes, I daresay I'm a very disagreeable person. I wonder as thee ever comes to see such a very disagreeable old woman, I'm sure! But there, I don't flatter myself as you do come to see me. Few visits you'd ever trouble *me* with if it was nor for Phil——"

"You know I don't come to see Phil!" broke in Elsie, indignantly.

"No, lass, I wor wrong there. You don't come to see Phil," said her aunt, bitterly. "You don't come to see Phil, unless," added she, "unless it be to torture him. Ay,

thou needn't wince," as she saw the girl's lips quiver at the unjust taunt. "I knows right well as thou don't care for him, poor lad. And why? Because he isn't a fine gentleman, thank God! and doesn't wear lace and fallals like your grand Lunnon friends do."

Elsie was by this time more than indignant. Her aunt was unjust and cruel. She did not love Phil, it is true; but not because he was only a farmer, rough and uncouth, with clothes that hung about him like rags; not because he had hands from which no washing would remove the dark horniness of the plough; but, simply because he was—Phil, and she could not love him, hard as she had tried, although her affection for him was deep, and called for no effort. Her aunt's words were hard to bear; but for Phil's sake, as for her own, Elsie bit her lips, and kept back the bitter rejoinder that sprung to them.

There was silence for a moment or two. Then Aunt Mary spoke again, in a softer voice and with less harshness in her manner. Hard as she appeared, and was, and brought up as she had been in the straitest sect of the Pharisees, she must not be judged too severely ; for how could she help it ? It was in the nature of things. Under her repulsive exterior-seeming she had a good heart, honest and true, which, despite herself, went out in a secret yearning of love to her sister's only child, to whom it was her dearest wish, though she strenuously denied it, even to herself, to see her son united.

“ You don't mean wrong, I'm sure, Elsie, and perhaps it is more sister Steele's fault than thine ; but there are things said about you and yon town gentleman as was a-staying at Tyler's.

“ What has been said, aunt ? ” asked Elsie, very softly and gravely, as her eyes

wandered away to honest Phil caressing his dog while he talked to Martin West.

“It be said thee were overmuch at Tyler’s, that you had been seen walking together, and——” a pause.

“I can guess the rest, aunt,” broke from the girl, in a subdued and restrained tone. “Do not tell me any more please, aunt,” continued Elsie sadly; “it is not true; that is not quite true, all of it. You don’t understand, aunt. Arth—Mr. Crosby, I mean—was very ill and weak. I have been to Tyler’s, and I have been with him, it’s true; but that is all. Why cannot people keep their tongues still, or at least speak the truth? Mother and father knew all about it, and they didn’t object; what business can it be of any one else’s?”

“Has he ever talked of love to thee,

lass?" was the next question her aunt bored into her like a gimlet.

"No-o," said Elsie, with long-drawn hesitance, "no-o."

This was true in the letter if not in the spirit, for though Arthur had often talked of love in the abstract, he had never told Elsie plainly in so many words that he loved her, though his whole manner and bearing had been a sufficient hint for a denser nature and duller understanding than Elsie's.

"Has he ever asked thee to marry him?" bluntly prodded her aunt.

"No."

"Thee'dst marry him if he did?"

"Aunt, how can you? Of course it's all nonsense," exclaimed Elsie, with quickening excitement.

Mrs. Rose was more or less content with, what she took to be, this emphatic disclaimer. Had she possessed, what her

puritanic exclusiveness forbade her acquiring, a wider knowledge of the world, she could hardly have indulged this pleasing hallucination. When a maiden vehemently repudiates all love for such an one, and declares that she would not an' she could, marry him for all the world, those of us who know human nature suspect the truth of the converse, though the subject may perchance be credited with all honesty.

"I'm glad to hear thee say it, Elsie," said her aunt, stiffly; "glad and thankful, I'm sure, for I feared I might have reason to think differently. Girls don't in general be seen out late at night i' these parts walkin' arm in crook wi' a man unless there be something a'tween 'em."

"Of course you have told Phil, aunt?"

"Of course I've told Philip."

"Poor old Phil!" sighed Elsie softly.

"Poor old Phil, indeed, you may well say

that. You have ruined his life, you have spoilt his future, you have made him an old man afore he is a young 'un, you have! He was a great fool ever to care for such as thou, he ought to have seen as thou wer't not fit to be an honest man's love. My lad is too good for thee, and, please God, he shall never wed thee, if I can prevent it!"

Elsie was completely stunned by this attack upon her. She felt it was thoroughly unjust. But she knew her aunt was not a reasonable woman, and therefore ought to have held her tongue instead of angrily retorting that she had not made Phil's life miserable intentionally. She was worthy of an honest man's love, she was worthy of Phil's love, and that, we take it, was saying a good deal. All this and a great deal more—her aunt scolding meanwhile, and both making themselves intensely miserable.

At length Elsie burst into the orthodox flood of tears, and said that her aunt wilfully accused her falsely. This was untrue. The accusation might be, nay was, false ; but Mrs. Rose was incapable of telling a lie, or of knowingly aggravating the gravity of her niece's misdeeds ; but her harsh creed made her always but too willing to see the worst side of a moral question and ready to be as severe as possible on every trifling error which a sweeter Christianity would hesitate to pronounce a fault.

Mrs. Rose was invulnerable to tears : her own emotions were deeply laid and difficult to stir, and she had but a poor opinion of people who were differently organized. She watched Elsie with ill-concealed contempt until the girl had so far mastered her feelings as to notice it.

“ It is contemptible to cry about such a thing,” said she, with impatient self-reproach,

“I am ashamed to have done it. I don’t see why I should care what you think of me, and I tell you again that what you have said is false. You have always disliked me, you have never been kind to me, and you believe everything you hear against me. I will never come here again. I will never speak to you again. You always make me feel so mean and pitiful, that I am miserable. You tell me I am selfish, frivolous, vain, idle, and heaven knows what else that is bad. What have I done to you that you should think so of me?”

Elsie would have gone on a good deal longer, but she was so excited that she could not get her words out. The philippic seemed to calm Mrs. Rose, for she rejoined more kindly than she had yet spoken,—

“My poor lass, you know what you have said is not true. You know I don’t hate

you, and if I scold you I only do it for your own good."

"Very likely," said the girl; "folks always do say disagreeable things for other people's good, but I don't intend you shall have the chance again. I shall go now, this minute."

"Don't let us part in anger, Elsie, lass. Let not the sun go down upon your wrath, remember. Come in, girl; if I didn't love you I should none scold you."

"No, I will not come in; I will not accept your hospitality. I will not defile your house by entering it!" said Elsie, with an emphasis there was no mistaking.

"Well, girl, do as thou will. I hope you may come to good, that's all; but a haughty spirit goeth before destruction."

Mrs. Rose felt her heart go out after the slender, graceful figure, with its upright indignant back, as it left the farmyard. She had said no more than truth when she told

Elsie that she loved her—as her own daughter, she might have added. Deep down in her heart there was a warm spring of natural affection, which unfortunately she viewed as a thing to be ashamed of, a weakness not to be indulged ; so that she herself was hardly aware of its existence, until, as on the present occasion, she succeeded in convincing other people of her perfect unamiability.

“God bless the girl,” she thought, as she looked after her ; “perhaps I was a little hard on her, but I meant it for the best. I think she tries to be a good girl, but her temper is a sad besetment ; she is disgracefully spoiled. That’s her mother’s fault. I’d have birched it out of her.”

Whether she would have succeeded in doing so or not is doubtful, but it would not have been for want of trying. Mrs. Rose had been brought up in the spare-the-rod-spoil-the-child school, and was a great respecter of

Solomon, that most brilliant theorist on parental discipline, who, in company with other brilliant theorists, so admirably illustrated his own aphorisms. Her own daughters could have testified, when alive, to her consistency with her belief: there were few days when their skins and the birch did not come into disagreeable contact.

As Elsie crossed the field she saw Phil, leaning against the stile, waiting for her with a face full of sympathy.

"Never thee mind, Elsie," he said, as the girl turned her head away to hide the tear-stains on her cheeks: "never thee mind, it's only mother's way, she has a kind heart but a rough tongue, my lass."

"She has given me a lick with the rough side of it," rejoined Elsie with a forlorn attempt at raillery.

Phil helped her through the stile and

walked silently by her side down the lane, looking at the flower-covered banks, not because he cared for them, but because he was delicate enough to perceive that his companion did not care to be looked at just then.

CHAPTER XII.

THE THROB OF A GREAT HEART.

PHIL walked quietly by Elsie's side down the lane ; once or twice he called her attention to the beauty of the dying bracken, or the glinting of the red, cold sunlight on the tiny cascades of the little stream ; but finding that his remarks met with no response he withdrew into the seclusion of that reserve which is oftentimes the mask of profoundest sympathy, and confined himself to clearing away the briars and brambles which here and there impeded the path. Elsie's abstraction deepened, and Phil was conscious that she was becoming more and more oblivious to

his presence, so that he was almost startled when, suddenly rousing herself, she turned to him and, holding out her hand, remarked, "Thank you, Phil, for coming with me. Please leave me now. I want to be alone."

"But Elsie, lass, there's nigh on two mile of high road for you to go; it's getting late and hardly safe, what with gipsies an' the like, for thee to go by thyself."

"No, Phil, I shall come to no harm—at least upon the high road, I mean. I am not happy; I want to be quite alone."

Phil glanced at her face.

"Well, well, as thee wilt, lass; mayhap thou art right. Good night, and God be wi' 'ee, Elsie."

"Good night, Phil," and she pursued the even tenor of her way; while Phil, heavy-hearted, turned and retraced his steps.

Not far up the lane was a gap in the hedge

which crowned the steep bank, through which was thrust the head and neck of a white calf, only that day separated from its dam.

At sight of Phil it gave vent to the anguish of its lonesomeness by one of those moans which baffle description by their plaintiveness.

“Eh ! poor beastie, art lonesome, too,” muttered Phil, looking up, “now thou’st no mother i’ th’ wide world ?”

Then an o’erweening desire to be of comfort to something mastered him, and he climbed up the steep bank, and forcing his way through the gap, caressed the poor little animal.

As he did so he thought of Elsie and wished,—oh ! how sincerely !—that it might have been his happiness to comfort her too. She, like this little calf, was alone ; separated by her uncommunicated sorrow from her

fellows, as this month-old calf was from its kin by his own hand.

Looking up he descried at a little distance the forlorn subject of his commiseration, which a turn in the lane had brought into view. The girl was going heavily, as if oppressed with sadness, and walking unsteadily, as if her burden of thought was too heavy for her to carry.

Vaguely he felt that his very presence had been a comfort to her as he walked by her side ; might not even his unknown nearness be in some sort a bridge of sympathy conveying the consolation of human nearness.

Acting upon this impulse, unreasoningly he followed her at a little distance, which, with the hedge, only separated the twain.

There was plenty of cover, but this Phil avoided, so that should Elsie turn her head she might see him at once ; for the sake of

being a possible comfort to her he was willing to risk even her displeasure. Once or twice he increased the distance between them, lest were she seeking relief to her feelings by holding audible converse with her soul he might chance to overhear.

Elsie's steps became slower and more slow ; yet Phil noted that at the same time they expressed a more decided mood, that the erstwhile drooping figure resumed its wonted trimness, and even in the fading light he could fancy from her carriage that the face he could not see had become set with a purpose that was almost defiance. And his heart fell, for this mood smote him with an undefined misgiving of nearing trouble.

In truth Phil's foreboding was not without foundation, although he was ignorant thereof. Elsie *was* getting defiant. A very little tenderness from her aunt would have brought

out all the hidden sweetness of the girl's nature ; but the unmerited blame roused into frenzy the devil of obstinacy which is always latent in adolescence.

The coarse coupling of her name with that of the man she loved made her coarse, and had blunted that finer sensitiveness of maidenhood which, until now, had girded Elsie with an unseen, unsuspected strength ; the presence of her better angel, the dew of life's young morning on her heart, the impalpable bloom which lends its loveliness to the blush of the peach. Woe ! woe ! to the ruthless hand which rudely disturbs that which God Himself never replaces.

And this her misguided, well-intentioned, rectangular, God-fearing relative had succeeded in doing.

Elsie went to the farm pure and simple-hearted ; she left it still pure, but with the seeds of evil and malignant thoughts sown

in her soul which the yeasty, turgid waters of injustice might cause to germinate into a dangerous moral incoherence.

What had she done to justify such a crowd of false imputations being heaped upon her? The girl knew her own innocence. That it should be impugned, by one whose piety she had been taught to regard as exemplary, perplexed her sorely, without lessening her resentment. If her aunt's conduct was good and her own evil, then, she argued, good and evil were only relative terms. She was but young, and passably ignorant; but she knew that the attack had been unjustifiable. What wonder, then, if she reasoned that it were better to follow the promptings of her own heart rather than the way of her aunt's unlovely righteousness?

Her sense of right had been violently outraged, and her soul's ear attuned to the songs of the tempter.

Mrs. Rose had managed, with the best of intentions, to completely justify the girl's confusion to herself of right and wrong. And Elsie endeavoured to shift the onus of her future conduct upon one who, as she thought, had wantonly undermined her sense of honour and shattered her self-esteem.

Elsie was illogical. Which of us is not whilst smarting under a sense of injury? And, alas! the sense of injury remains long after the wrong has been perpetrated, and, perchance, forgiven. And nothing is harder to forgive, or more impossible to forget, than the misconstruction of motive and the slander of honour.

When Elsie set out for Hockley, it was in the hope that she might catch a glimpse of Arthur Crosby : perhaps as on her return she passed the Tylers' house, or perchance might even see him dismount from the Salisbury stage ; but now she determined to wait on

the road until that lumbering conveyance should pass. In that act of defiant self-assertion she felt she should gain some relief. There had been no tangible harm in their acquaintance, and if others chose to make scandal of it, that was their business, she would not deprive them of the ground.

In her heart she hoped she might be seen and the news of her action reach her aunt's ears, for she felt that she should derive some pleasure from the other's learning how little effect her words had taken.

So the girl lingered and loitered in dangerous dalliance with her own worst self, and the devil answered her prayer.

For nearly an hour before its time the rumble of the old stage broke upon her ear, and a few minutes later she discovered her lover seated on the box beside the driver, half hidden by the steam which smoked from the six jaded horses.

Suddenly Elsie discovered something in quite an opposite direction which called for her immediate attention, and feigned to be elaborately unconscious of the heavy stage that was passing. Crosby signed to her, but she was utterly oblivious, although not a gesture escaped her ; so, hastily stopping the antique conveyance, he dismounted, and joined the girl.

Elsie greeted him with ill-affected surprise, for the tell-tale blush and the welcome that danced in her eyes betrayed her.

“ You act badly, child,” Arthur remarked, as he took the hand shyly extended with half-conscious grace, and endeavoured to gaze into the eyes which were instantly averted. “ Confess now you are glad to see me back ? You have missed me—yes ? ”

“ Who—I ? ” retorted Elsie, with that coquettish affectation of indifference which she had instinctively adopted as most intelli-

gible to her questioner. "And why should I be glad, pray?"

"Never mind why. Look me in the face and tell me you are not."

Elsie did so. At this moment the stage disappeared round a bend of the road, and the next thing Elsie knew, her head was resting on his shoulder and his lips were brooding upon hers in one long lingering, masterful kiss; a wild tumult was in the girl's heart, indignation and resistance were alike paralyzed, and she surrendered herself to the voluptuous delirium of that embrace.

Phil had seen it all, and reeled as if a dull, heavy blow had fallen upon his heart. He staggered and clutched at a fence to support himself. The effort recalled him to a sense of time and place. Humbly he turned about to retrace his steps. He knew that his mission was over, and felt that his further presence would be an intrusion.

Then this strong man silently put from him all the hopes of his life, and in his strength found no place for bitterness against that other man, but only for love stronger than death, and devotion pure and chivalrous, for the woman about whose life his own had grown.

Silently he took his homeward way. As he passed, the little white calf moaned piteously at him in its mad motherlessness, so he took it home with him, and tended it with pathetic gentleness.

CHAPTER XIII.

MASKS AND FACES.

“WHAT, Elsie lass! Back a’ready? I didna expect thee for an hour or two yet,” said Mrs. Steele, as the girl came into the kitchen where the housewife was preparing the early supper. “It’s not like thee to be before thy time. Where’s Phil?”

“Phil did not come with me all the way,” she replied.

“It’s not like Phil to let ’ee come alone; but there, what with the cows, and the pigs, and the men, and all they grat’ stacks o’ wheat to thrash, his hands be o’er full at the turn o’ the year. Dunno thee mind, lass, he

would e'en a-come if he could, as thou know'st right well," said Mrs. Steele, with whom the wish was evidently father to the thought.

"Yes," assented Elsie evasively, "Phil would have come if he could, I am sure, but I wouldn't let him."

"Well, mayhap you were right, lass ; 'tis the time for Phil to be minding o' money agen' the time he'll want it, for Phil ain't the man to abide taking a wife home to nowt, so to speak it ; but it warn't like thee to think o' that none the more, thou'llt be a girl o' sense some day yet, Elsie, I mind me."

"I hope so," said Elsie cheerily.

"What's that thou hop'st, lass ? " asked the saddler, who, having closed his shop with sundown, entered at this moment. Then without waiting for an answer, he continued, "But I am well content to have 'ee back, my girl ; meat never tastes the same when art

away. Let's look at thee, lass ; the walk has gien thee back thy colour."

"Ay, so it has," assented Mrs. Steele, "the girl looks many a pound better, in a manner o' putting it, for a-goin' across to Hockley. How did 'ee find Aunt Mary?"

"I think she was quite well, anyway, she was more cross than usual."

"Her allus is," grunted the alderman ; "'tis the woman's manner. What had she agin'ee this time, lass?"

"Oh, the same thing," said Elsie wearily ; "told me I was vain, frivolous and idle, said that you and mother did your best to spoil me, and that I should come to a bad end if I didn't alter my ways."

"Ah! sister Rose were allus as one born out o' due season ; she should 'a lived i' the days o' they minor prophets as was forever fortellin' evil to other poor souls. She be a righteous good woman i' her way, for cer-

tain," remarked Mrs. Steele. "What's she done with the dimity piece she bought last fair time?"

"I didn't ask," replied the girl.

"Not ask, Elsie! What wert thinking of? And what were Sister Mary thinkin' of not to tell 'ee, as is allus so full o' her makin's and doin's?"

"To tell the truth," said Elsie uncomfortably, "I didn't go in."

Which piece of information reduced Mrs. Steele to speechlessness, so her father continued the conversation by ejaculating:

"Not go in, child, how come that?"

"Aunt was so unkind that I got cross, father," and the girl reddened at the remembrance of her aunt's onslaught.

"An' thou wert right, girl," spoke her father sturdily, stroking her sunny hair with his big rough hand. "I'm not sayin' as she's not a righteous good woman, wife, but

her 's too masterful and interferin'. I, for one, wouldna' be surprised if she were found i' the Skimmington, many a wench has had it, ay, and deserved it too, for less than her's done. Thou wert right to come home, my lass."

"Dont'ee get helpin' the girl to uppishness," interrupted his wife; "'tis a fault in her a'ready, so to put it; well, what hast 'ee been doin' wi' thyself these three hours?"

"Quarrelling with Phil, too, mayhap?" questioned the alderman slyly.

"No!" replied Elsie, with an indignation, the emphasis of which was too natural to be mistaken. Mrs. Steele was mollified. "I should be worse than Aunt Mary if I could quarrel with dear old Phil. I wish I were half as kind and good as he is."

"Thou wilt do, lass," said her father reassuringly; "nobbut what Philip Rose be as good a man as any 'twixt here and Salis-

bury, ay, or any other place for that matter. 'Tis odd that so sweet an apple should come of such a crab. Did he walk home wi' 'ee, lass ? ”

“ Part ways,” said Elsie. “ We walked very slowly along the lane. Oh, father ! ” she gushed, “ it was so lovely, with the sun setting all gold and red over the road.”

“ Ay, an' I'll wager thou be not the first girl as has thought that lane looked lovely i' like case,” said her father, with cumbersome banter.

“ 'Tis true, father,” assented Mrs. Steele ; “ and I'll pound it there's many a girl in Winterbourne as ud find it pleasant in all weathers 'longside o' Philip Rose.”

This kindly-meant banter was not a little painful to Elsie ; it filled her with an uncomfortable consciousness of duplicity. The simple confidence of her father and mother

stung her, and it made her heart ache to reflect how bitterly their kindly hopes and plans were to be disappointed ; whilst her parents were pluming themselves upon the happy course events were taking, she was conscious that she had rendered impossible the fulfilment of their hopes. Qualms of conscience were a novel experience to Elsie, and as unpleasant as they were strange ; and an equally unwelcome reflection obtruded itself upon her mind when her thoughts reverted to Phil, for Elsie remembered sadly his acquiescence in her wish to be alone—quite alone, and she knew from his manner that he had realized how impossible it was that he should ever become more to her than he had always been.

“ I saw Mr. Crosby as I was coming home, father.”

“ Did’ee now, lass ; an’ he be come till

the very day! E——h! but the travelling o' these times be wonderful."

"'Tis true," said Mrs. Steele reflectively; "but I doubt if the Lord ever meant horses to be used as they be now, a-flying and a-tearing all over the face o' the earth. 'Taint in religion, in a manner o' speaking; all this hell-rakin' rushin' o' folk into one another's parts, ain't no sort o' good to man or beast. If the good Lord had a meant we to be allus a-choppin' and changin' our places He'd a furnished we wi' four legs i'stead o' two," she concluded, with piously-folded hands and upturned eyes, like some preachers we have seen, when finishing a perfervid peroration.

Evidently the saddler thought so, for he was moved to bow his head, as if he expected the benediction to follow. Finding it didn't come, he furtively turned his head, and addressed Elsie:—

“Did’st speak to Mr. Crosby, my girl?”

“Yes, father. He said he was quite strong again, but felt tired after his long journey. He came all the way from Winchester to-day, and only left London yesterday.”

: During this speech Mrs. Steele watched her daughter narrowly, and was reassured by the girl’s apparent indifference. Arthur was wrong, Elsie could act well at times.

“Mr. Crosby was monstrous polite, father; he hoped you and mother were well, and said he would do himself the pleasure of coming to talk with you.”

“Ay, lass, we shall be vastly proud to see him, and hear the gay news o’ Lunnon,” said the worthy alderman, excessively flattered. “Master Crosby is none o’ your stuck-up gentlemen as is too high and mighty to speak with an honest tradesman; he be one o’ the right sort, he be.”

“I’m none so sure o’ that,” rejoined his wife, with some acerbity. “We be well enough for he so long as there’s nobody better for he to talk to. Master Crosby be muchly like other folk, I reckon, glad enow’ to serve his own ends, and——”

Here the good dame was interrupted in the flow of her didactic and censorious eloquence by the unannounced entrance of Mr. Mayor, for which one, at least, of the party was devoutly thankful.

Now, if there was one thing for which Richard Tyler was more remarkable than another, it was the dignity of his deportment; he might forget the blacksmith, but he never lost sight of the Mayor, and with reason, for he had been chosen to that office some five years before, and had so thoroughly justified the wisdom of the choice as to cause him to be continued therein, until both he and the burgesses had almost forgotten

the possibility of change. Moreover, during the greater part of this period, had he not exercised the still more onerous functions of Alderman of the Guild Merchant? And it behoved the man who, figuratively speaking, had his finger on the commercial pulse of the town, to comport himself with becoming gravity.

Important as his magisterial duties were to Tyler, the alderman was supreme in his regard. There were not many places, at the time of which our story treats, in which the privileges of the Guild Merchant continued unimpaired. Of these Winterbourne was one, and Mr. Tyler was resolved that they should suffer no diminution at his hands. In this matter at least he was no reformer, for any reformation would affect his own interests. It was within the scope of his powers to give or refuse permission to tradesmen to open shops in the

town; and this right Mr. Tyler very freely exercised, somewhat to the benefit of his fellow-tradesmen and entirely to the benefit of Mr. Tyler. The townsfolk grumbled, it is true, but they, not being members of the guild, were ignored; in consequence the population of the neighbouring villages increased, while that of Winterbourne decreased in direct ratio.

But on this night neither the dignity of the Mayor, nor the importance of the Alderman of the Guild, sufficed to enable Mr. Tyler to preserve his equanimity. He was evidently ill at ease, nay, absolutely flustered, and his ruffled serenity expressed itself in a studied politeness to Mrs. Steele and Elsie, which was as foreign to his natural manner as it was altogether ludicrous. As a rule the Mayor was not polite to women, they having no guild rights. Women were not of much account in Mr.

Tyler's system of social economy under the best of circumstances, and at times they had presented points of difficulty in relation to guild-law which had sadly troubled his spirit.

Mrs. Steele observed his perturbation, so, after a few commonplaces she withdrew, taking Elsie with her.

An awkward pause ensued.

"Tyler, thee art not getting on with thy cyder, yet it be reckoned a very pretty cyder by them as is judges. Drink up, man, and fill again."

"Yes, 'tis an elegant cyder," assented the Mayor abstractedly; "a very pretty cyder, for sure."

"An' you don't drink it, yet in general thou art fond of it, in a manner of putting it."

The Mayor made a motion of assent, and another silence ensued during which Steele puffed contentedly at his churchwarden.

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“Neighbour Steele,” broke in the Mayor suddenly, as he shifted uneasily in his chair, “I have come to consult thee on a matter of business.”

“Ay!”

As Mr. Tyler seemed to find some difficulty in proceeding, Steele continued to smoke, mentally resolving which of the many concerns in which his visitor was interested was that on which his advice could be of any assistance to his usually independent neighbour.

His confusion was not lessened when Tyler began discursively to review his own history.

“Thou rememberest, Steele, the day when I was out o’ my time, and the feast we had at the next ‘morning talk.’ ’Twas a heavenly drink we had, for sure!”

“True, true; ’twas a glorious occasion.”

“An’ thou rememberest, too, the little

bit of a forge I did open, a-nigh the mill pool, and the cottage ayond as Betty and I lived in, arter we'd been to church, an' walked the town arm-i-crook ?”

“ Ay, ay,” said Steele, wondering more and more at this outburst of sentiment on the part of his usually prosaic neighbour.

“ Them was good days, for sure. We was both young then, and poor enough, mayhap ; an' now thou'rt well nigh the warmest man o' the town, so to speak it.”

“ Not so warm as thou, Tyler. The Lord have prospered we, for which let us return merciful thanksgiving.”

“ *Thou* art warm, neighbour, not me,” returned the blacksmith.

“ Then the tongue o' the town do lie, Tyler.”

“ Tis so ; I would it did not.”

“ Well, neighbour, every pot should know what's in it, but—— ”

“’Tis true, poor heart. Eh! Steele, but thou hast been wiser nor I ; if I had ’tended to my forge as thou hast to thy shop I should ha’ been in better fettle this day. I ha’ gi’en too much o’ my time to the benefit o’ the town, been a helpin’ o’ every other body save mysen.”

“Helpin’ others i’ the guild be pretty much the same as helpin’ thysen, I be thinkin’, friend Tyler,” replied Steele laconically.

“’Tis not so, Steele ; here be I wi’out so much as a ’prentice, and not another guild fellow i’ the town wi’out one ; an’ yet I be th’ only blacksmith i’ the borough.”

“Thy ’prentices has had so much hardship in up-setting that folk be feared to bind to thee, mayhap.”

“Yes, none o’ them ever set up by my allowin’ ; but, neighbour, nor have I let them o’ other guildsmen. An’ the consequence be that there be fewer traders i’ this town than

there be in Hedbourne, which be not half the size, only it ain't got no guild alderman worth putting a name to. Likewise, what master has ever sent a 'prentice to me an' I clapped him not i' the Bridewell or the stocks ? or wanted indentures broken', an', as Mayor I ha' not sanctioned it ?”

“I think I mind me o' two or three, Tyler,” interposed Steele ; “though I should not be so uncivil to a neighbour as to name it.”

“I own it with pride ; some masters be oppressive, and bad guildsfolk, that's for certain. But 'tis not in reason they should ruin their lads' prospects,” rejoined Tyler, who was evidently anxious to conciliate his neighbour.

The alderman was more perplexed than ever as to what his guest was driving at, but long experience of Mr. Tyler satisfied him that there was some end in view. Accordingly he merely assented dryly,—

“ Well, neighbour Steele, thou seest I ha’ done all as in me lay for the good o’ the town.”

“ Guild,” corrected his host.

“ They be pretty much the same, I’m thinkin’. Thou hast benefited by it. There be no other sadler i’ the place.”

“ I deny it not. Doubtless it hath been good wi’ me ; likewise, there be no other blacksmith than thysen.”

“ An’ no good it’s done me. Pity ’tis our guild baint wider. There’s my ’prentice Tum-mus Stubbs, not out o’ his time five weeks an’ settin’ up i’ the barn ayon the bridge, not a stone’s throw from my forge. Rot him, an’ I cannot stay ’ee, for that plaguy river, not a dozen yards wide, leaves he i’ the parish o’ Hockley. Ay, Steele, but there’ll be no good trade agin till the laws be altered an’ we can put folk i’ the stocks for goin’ abon the boundaries. Only this day I ha’ seen seven old customers walkin’ horses to his

place. Tummus do undersell me one half, they told me."

"Thou's kep thy charges too high, Tyler, down 'em, mon, down 'em."

"Nay, neighbour Steele, nay, I mun e'en charge more an' I am to live."

"See then, Tyler, thou say'st I have prospered, yet hast heard ony complaint o' my charges? There's no 'prentice o' mine as have set up either i' Hockley or the other villages around."

"Maybe thou'rt right, it be not for me to gainsay thee. Anyway, it be too late now, I'm feared."

"What dost mean?"

"I mean that unless thou wilt help an old friend, who has allus worked in wi'ee like, I be a ruined man."

"Thou be ruined?" gasped Steele, as his long churchwarden slipped through his nerveless fingers on to the hearth, and smashed.

“’Tis so. Thou knows’t that the house and forge be mortgaged?’

“Ay, I have heard it so spoke.”

“That scoundrel Tummus Stubbs have got the mortgage i’some fashion, and he have sent Master Muckthwaite, the scrivener, to say that unless I can pay ’en, he’ll foreclose, and sell me up, stick and stone, by light o’ candle.”

“But that cannot ruin thee.”

“Ay, Steele, ’tis Bible truth that woe be to them as hastes to grow rich. I ha’ found ’en so. Wi’ shame o’ face I confess it, but what wi’ buyin’ and sellin’, I ha’ gotten loss i’ stead o’ gain. ’Twill be the debtors’ jail wi’ me, Steele, unless thou canst help me.”

Now, Mr. Steele, to do him justice, was by no means an ungenerous man, neither did he dislike the idea of helping an old friend, but he was tenacious in his grasp on the wealth he had acquired by long years of

labour, and this more for the sake of others than for himself. Without being close-fisted in our modern sense of the term, he was loth to part with his hard-earned savings, and though he had, from a certain uncouth delicacy, avoided mentioning it, he had suspected for some time past that Tyler's affairs were in a bad way, although he had not known they might possibly be hopeless, and was not altogether disposed to throw water into a sieve. Still, if Tyler could give reasonable security, he was quite willing to strain a point to help him.

“An' how can I help 'ee?” he asked. “It would be bad for the mayor to be i' Porchester gaol. What'll clear thee?”

Tyler named a sum that made honest Steele start.

“Tyler, thou'rt in a bad way. Thou wantest more than I ha' gotten. What security hast to offer?”

“There'll be the house and forge, 'twill be summat.”

“But not much.”

“'Tis not all, neighbour Steele, thou shalt become Mayor and Alderman o' the Guild.”

“An what good will that be to me?”

The other hesitated; truly it was an awkward question to answer, for he had but now been boasting of his “public spirit,” and to have to confess that the value of the positions he held lay in the openings for speculation they presented was embarrassing. Still, it had to be done, and with all the craftiness he possessed, which was not a little, he pointed out to Steele the many ways of feathering his own nest at the expense of his neighbours, and by the prostitution of his powers, which would be open to him. Steele was no fool, neither was he troubled with an over scrupulous conscience,

but at the same time this pettifogging dishonesty was so far foreign and distasteful to the straightforward nature of the man, as to fill him with a righteous moral indignation very flattering to his self-complacency.

“Dom thee man, what dost mean? Here be I, a man as has kept mysen honest and well-faced i’ the place for nigh on sixty years, and thou comest here offering to make me as big a knave as thou art, if I will help thee in thy cheats. I’ve done wi’ee. I’d a thought of old ties about me, and when I’ve see’d thy goings on have held my tongue as becomes a good guildsman and fellow-townsman ; but when thou comest and wants me to become a scoundrel and a sorner, I’ve done wi’ee. Me prevent poor ’prentices o’ setting up unless they pay me ; me keep widders out o’ free bench unless they go shares i’ their bit o’ money wi’ me, me grow fat on other folks’ starvation ; me grind the

face o' the poor ! Thou art mistaken in thy man, Tyler ! ”

“ Yes, I am mistaken in my man,” returned Tyler bitterly, and with rising anger, “ I thought I wor dealing wi' a man as had feelings, as had a good heart and some bowels o' compassion, not wi' a priest and Levite as 'ud pass by on t'other side.”

“ Go thy ways, Tyler, go thy ways. I'll do nought to ruin thee, but I wanna turn a hand to help thee, for, by thy own showing, thou hast nowt but thy knavish tricks to thank for being i' this fettle.”

During this speech Alderman Steele had risen, and now stood holding the door he had flung wide open, drawn to his height and with his usually good-humoured face set in hard lines, looking the picture of an altogether stern and uncompromising monitor.

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Mayor slunk out, and Steele closed the door behind him.

Then the pent-up passion of the man burst forth. The good folks of Winterbourne had been long a-bed or they would have been startled to see the stately Mayor shaking his fist at the window behind which the light revealed the saddler's figure. And even daylight would have been barely sufficient to cause Tyler to restrain his rage. Steele had been his one hope, his final sheet anchor ; for if the Alderman would not help him he knew no one else in the town would, and now ruin was hopelessly imminent. He had shown his sordid soul to eyes that had flashed scorn and contempt upon him, he had laid bare the trivial criminality of his life for nothing, and he thirsted for vengeance on the man who knew him as he was.

"Curse'ee ! Curse'ee !" he spluttered in the incoherence of the rage that almost

rendered him speechless. "Curse'ee ! for a cold-hearted Pharisee. Thou art an honest man, and well spoken on, art thou? Thy good name shall not last an' I can get at thee. Look to thyself, Steele ; look to thyself' I say !"

But, rack his brains as he might, Tyler could not but recognize how impotent he was, and how invulnerable was the armour in which his neighbour had enveloped himself.

Nevertheless on every step of his homeward path his malignancy beat in upon his brain the purpose of revenge, never doubting that a will so strong should discover for itself an adequate way.

END OF VOL. I.

